

**The Production and Consumption of the Sexually Explicit; A Painterly  
Exploration into the Pornification of Culture**

By

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BFA (Hons) First Class

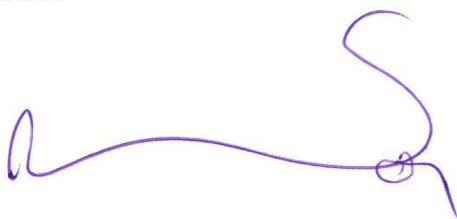
Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Fine Art

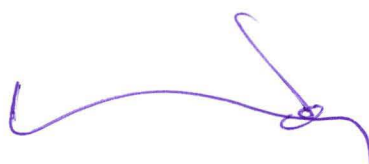
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A handwritten signature in purple ink, consisting of a stylized 'M' followed by a long horizontal stroke and a large 'S' shape.

Mat Ward

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A handwritten signature in purple ink, consisting of a series of loops and a final flourish.

Mat Ward

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my peers, colleagues and the staff at the University of Tasmania for providing an engaging and stimulating environment for research and my supervisor Dr. Mary Scott and co-supervisor Mr. Paul Zika for all their guidance and support.



## ABSTRACT

This research project examines the phenomena of *Pornification*, a term invented to describe the proliferation and commodification of sexually explicit material within contemporary culture. The central proposition has been to produce a unique suite of paintings that respond to pornography's current position within mainstream society. The research was conducted with the aim of pictorially representing the variety of ways individuals engage with pornography, including as a means for sexual arousal, personal expression and as a cultural informer, and seeks to further both the understanding and proliferation of sexually explicit imagery in order to reflect the influence that pornography has on daily contemporary life.

The desire to produce this thesis comes from a personal attraction to sexual imagery and an intellectual curiosity as to the positive and negative outcomes of the embrace of pornography that is currently taking place, on many levels, throughout contemporary western culture.

Conceptual and formal development of this project is indebted to the work of artists Marcus Harvey, Jasper Goodall, Richard Larter and Eric Fischl. Sexuality and the sexual image lies at the core their respective practices, exploring homemade pornography, porn chic and the crossover between the public and private domains. Theoretical analyses of *Pornification*, provided by authors Ariel Levy, Catherine Lumby and Susanna Paasonen, were instrumental for understanding how pornography is used in western society and how it has moved from the fringes of culture to its current prominent position. The researching and discussion of these works was critical in providing context for the development of the paintings and establishing where the project sits within the field.

Three specific lines of enquiry were pursued. First, *porn chic* was examined through Generation Y's embrace and employment of the pornographic aesthetic. Second, an exploration of pornography's infiltration into the mainstream psyche via the domestic environment and last, the production and

consumption of pornography was investigated utilizing homemade pornography sourced from the Internet.

The works produced in this thesis provide a critical re-presentation of the differing ways we, as a society, engage with the sexually explicit. The outcomes highlight the variety of contexts in which pornography is produced, consumed and commodified across different generations, social structures and technologies. The paintings are produced with the intent of broadening the understanding of how we interact with pornography and how it has become firmly entrenched in our society. In this way they contribute, visually, to the body of knowledge concerning sexually explicit material in western culture.

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## THE PROJECT

### Background, Aims and Significance

This research project investigates, through the medium of paint, the way that pornography has infiltrated mainstream culture. It follows my explorations of contemporary sexuality that started in my undergraduate studies and continued through my Honours degree. It specifically examines the way pornography has become part of the fabric of the modern world through its commodification, and production and consumption by the general populace. The aesthetics and tropes of porn are everywhere in our society and are routinely employed in contemporary marketing, personal expression and entertainment. Its influence on culture is visual, intellectual and verbal. The term 'pornification' has been invented to describe this phenomenon.<sup>1</sup>

The project is comprised of three series of figurative paintings. The first suite of works, *My Pussy Loves Rich Boys*, refers to Generation Y and how they engage with the look and language of porn - known as porn chic. Growing up in an era where sexually explicit imagery and language is ubiquitous, this generation borrows freely from pornography to express their sexuality and attitudes towards life. The intention, with this series, is to visualize, pictorially, the relationship between Generation Y and the tropes of pornography. There is, too, an aim to highlight the irony present in this interaction, in particular, the contradiction between a desire for sexual empowerment and the conformity to sexual stereotypes.

The second series, *There Goes The Neighbourhood*, explores the position of pornography in contemporary western culture through the deployment of prominent examples of activities and ideas associated with porn that have been normalized and assimilated into mainstream society. The paintings, in this series, use domestic spaces and explore a more prosaic appropriation of pornography. The objective is to represent the broader phenomenon of pornification through depiction of well-documented examples of its

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<sup>1</sup> Paasonen, S, Nikunen, K & Saarenmaa, L (eds) 2007 *Pornification; Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture* Oxford/Berg Publishers New York.

manifestation, including the overt sexualisation of the entertainment industry and the promotion of porn stars as mainstream media icons.

The third series, *Amateurland*, draws on the genre of amateur pornography - exemplified by the proliferation of 'self-published' erotic material broadcast through the public domain via the Internet. Homemade porn is the dominant pornographic genre and differs considerably from the offerings of the professional adult entertainment industry. It is produced for a variety of reasons other than pure sexual arousal. There is an interest in artistic expression, interpersonal communication and sexual experimentation. In response to this, the goal of this series is to create a visual language that gives voice to the diversity of homemade sexual imagery as a form of both pornography and sexual self-expression.

Underpinning the project is my own involvement with the production and consumption of pornography. Pornography has been a facet of my life that has provided both entertainment and intellectual stimulation since I was in my teens. My use of porn has been both pleasurable and a source of contention. It has provided me with an avenue to indulge in, explore and confront my own objectification of the female body, my expectations of sex and sexual fantasy. A personal attraction to imagery, whether erotic, sexually intriguing or challenging is the starting point for my engagement with the subject matter. There is, too, recognition that I am contributing to the proliferation of sexual imagery in culture and the mainstreaming of pornography by producing sexually explicit work and releasing it into the public sphere via exhibitions and on-line publishing.

The outcome of this research is a large body of paintings across three series. They visually convey the variety of contexts that pornography exists within contemporary culture. The project significantly adds to the field of inquiry by its detailed exploration into the variety of ways pornography has infiltrated mainstream society, how individuals interact with porn including its consumption and production, how porn influences our personal understanding and exploration of sexuality, and through its own representation of sexually explicit imagery which further increases the proliferation of pornography in western culture.

## CONTENT

### Introduction

Western culture is saturated in sexual imagery. To an extent it always has been. Sex sells, and in a market economy it continues to be a powerful tool in attracting the attention of potential customers. Sex in entertainment has also been with us for centuries. Pornography is part of this. What is new though, I think, is how pornography has infiltrated popular culture. The only other period in western history where explicit sexual imagery was such a fixture of daily life was in Roman times. In a staggeringly short amount of time, pornography has gone from being an outsider genre to a bona fide part of mainstream society. Ten years ago porn was still something generally discussed privately or if in public, then framed by critique and more often than not moral panic. Recently, the prime time current affairs program *Sixty Minutes* reported on the phenomenon of pornification. The commentators framed their enquiry with the phrase 'it's part of the mainstream.'<sup>2</sup>

There are many elements contributing to pornography's assimilation into popular culture. Easy access to sexually explicit material on the Internet is an example. Certainly, the advertising and entertainment industry's use of sexually suggestive (and explicit) material has established highly sexualized imagery as a normal part of the public domain. The adult entertainment industry, itself, is pro-active in raising it's profile within the public arena; porn stars transfer readily into commercial movie making, television and product endorsement. There appears, also, to be a public fascination with the porn industry as evidenced by the success of Hollywood cinema releases such as *Boogie Nights* (1997), *Sex: The Annabel Chong Story* (1999) and *Wadd* (2001), films that examine the world of adult entertainment from the viewpoint of the producers and actors.

The explicitness of sexual imagery in western culture is also increasing. Proliferation leads to de-sensitization through over-exposure, resulting in the need for images to become even more extreme and challenging in order to

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<sup>2</sup> *Sixty Minutes* 2008, television program, Channel Nine, Sydney, 26<sup>th</sup> October

attract the attention of the viewer. This is exemplified in the advertising and entertainment industries, which have become increasingly explicit with their promotional material and music video clips. The marketing of these products is particularly focused on getting the attention of Generation Y, who have grown up in a highly sexualized media environment.

Pornography is informing culture in many less obvious ways as well, notable in the recent craze of pole dancing as a fitness routine, the reference to sexual techniques of porn stars in sex therapy and trends in body fashion like augmentation and hairlessness.<sup>3</sup> The general sexualization of culture has been referred to as 'porn chic'.



Pole dancing instructional video, breast augmentation blogsite and stills from music video *Lapdance* By N.E.R.D featuring highly sexualized content.

The adoption of porn chic as a template for self-expression and lifestyle choice has come to be known as 'raunch culture'. Common in the contemporary vernacular raunch culture applies to overt and risqué activities of a sexualized nature, divorced from accepted moral codes. It has a

<sup>3</sup> Paasonen, S, Nikunen, K & Saarenmaa, L (eds) *op.cit.*, pp. 8-9

particular emphasis on the behaviour of young women who act in ways that have been traditionally associated with masculine sexual behaviour.

### **Porn Chic and Raunch Culture**

Ariel Levy, in her 2005 publication *Female Chauvinist Pigs; Women and the Rise Of Raunch Culture*<sup>4</sup>, discusses raunch culture in terms of the increasing prevalence of public sexual display. She highlights the postures, attitudes, the wearing of revealing clothing and the use of sexualized language of young women in the United States:

Apart from her Girls Gone Wild hat, nineteen year old Debbie was wearing a rhinestone Playboy bunny ring, white stilettos that laced in tight X's up her hairless calves, and wee shorts that left the lowest part of her rear in contact with the night air. Body glitter shimmered across her tan shoulders and rose in a sparkling arc from her cleavage to her clavicle. "The body is such a beautiful thing," she said. "If a woman's got a pretty body and she likes her body, let her show it off! It exudes confidence when people wear little clothes". Cope was a tiny person who could have passed for fifteen. On the preceding night she had done a scene for GGW, which is to say she pulled down her shorts and masturbated for them on camera in the back of the bar. She said she felt bad for "not doing it right" because for some reason she couldn't achieve orgasm.<sup>5</sup>

In Catherine Lumby's 1997 book *Bad Girls; Sex, Feminism and the Media in the 90's*<sup>6</sup> the author suggests Generation Y has developed a relationship with media and contemporary sexual imagery that is sophisticated,

<sup>4</sup> Levy, A 2005 *Female Chauvinist Pigs; Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, Free Press, New York.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.10 -11.

<sup>6</sup> Lumby, C 1997 *Bad Girls; Sex, Feminism and the Media in the 90's*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.



knowledgeable and discerning; a position that allows them to engage with porn chic and pornography without taking it to heart. Recent commentary, however, questions Lumby's theory. It is argued that a highly sexualized culture is neither empowering men nor women. Levy's detailed analysis of current trends in western culture is critical of porn chic. She is of the view that what may appear to be indicative of sexual freedom is actually a regressive and limiting view of sexuality.

We have to ask ourselves why we are so focused on silent girly-girls in G-strings *faking* lust. This is not a sign of progress, it's a testament to what's still missing from our understanding of female sexuality with all of its complexity and power. We are still so uneasy with the vicissitudes of sex we need to surround ourselves with caricatures of female hotness to safely conjure up the concept of 'sexy'. When you think about it, it's kind of pathetic. Sex is one of the most interesting things we as humans have to play with, and we've reduced it to polyester underpants and implants. We are selling ourselves unbelievably short.<sup>7</sup>

Regressive or not, porn chic is everywhere, noticeably it is a dominant factor in how Generation Y express themselves, influencing their fashion, language and behaviour. Their interaction with the tropes of pornography represents just how embedded with porn chic our culture has become and their attitudes towards it suggest a familiarity born from immersion in the imagery. As culture gets more explicit it is logical that more extreme forms of expression are required in order to differentiate oneself from the norm. The quest for identity - part and parcel of adolescence - always involves pushing the boundaries and challenging the acceptable codes and mores of society. In a culture where porn chic is acceptable, pushing the boundaries requires an even higher level of bare flesh, foul language and provocative attitude. This

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<sup>7</sup> Levy, *op.cit.*, pp. 198

in itself further proliferates porn chic, giving it an embodied public representation.

Porn chic, and its offspring raunch culture, enters the public domain through the media. Ideas, language and images are broadcast into our daily lives via billboards, television, movies, the Internet and art. The media and its newest audience, Generation Y, are participating in a very similar form of proliferating porn chic: continually upping the ante as their presentations (of self or of products) lose their ability to attract attention.



Contemporary advertising utilizing porn chic

In the age of the Internet everyone has the capacity to create media. Porn chic visibility increases via these channels as well. Internet hosting sights such as *flickr* and *myspace* are used to distribute imagery and ideas to friends and anyone else that is logged in. Seemingly innocent web uploads, such as snaps from a party, or gossip discussing the latest celebrities wild antics, all contribute to a general pornification of culture. The speed at which

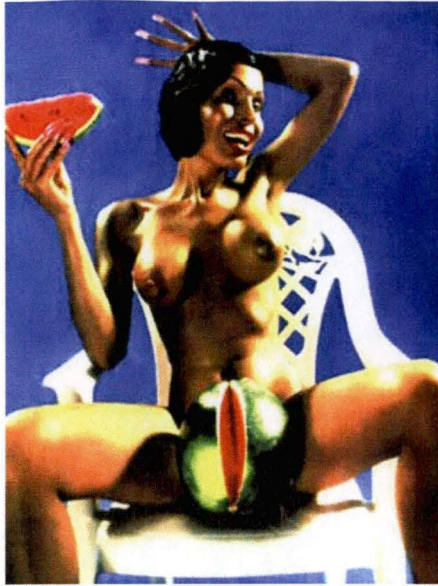
information can be distributed via online publishing also guarantees that ideas and aesthetics rapidly spread and integrate themselves into the cultural fabric.



Self-published photos from *flickr* website

There are, too, a group of contemporary artists who are seen to contribute to the proliferation of porn chic through their production of sexually based artwork. Several can even lay claim to having a direct influence on the aesthetics of porn chic in a similar way to the advertising and entertainment industries. English artist Jasper Goodall is one such artist whose design orientated silk screens and prints have helped shape the look of contemporary sexuality. His work emphasises the glamour, hedonism and excess of twenty first century party culture. American photographer David LaChapelle also captures and influences porn chic. His use of celebrities as models further injects a sense of glamour and stardom into an already fantasy fuelled culture.





David LaChapelle 1998 *Melon*  
80 x 65 cm Photograph



Jasper Goodall 2002 *Jolly Roger*  
80 x 60 cm Digital Print

Both artists have a background in the advertising industry, and have won awards for their campaigns for *Nike*, *Diesel Clothing* and *Coca Cola*. Their success in advertising gave them a public profile on which to build artistic careers. Their work contributes to porn chic through their emphasis of style over substance, and their promotion of the attitude that success is gauged by how sexy people think you are.

Porn chic may simply be the latest in a long line of fashion statements to capture the imagination of the public. Its links to pornography allows individuals to indulge in the fantasy and rebellion associated with care-free attitudes towards sex and sexuality. Its current popularity is, I feel, reflective of more than this, and points towards a general shift in the relationship between pornography and mainstream society. This change in dynamics between porn and culture has come to be known as pornification.

## Pornography and Pornification

The next phase of my candidature investigated how pornography has influenced culture in ways other than the visual style of porn chic. The paintings of Eric Fischl and Richard Larter, who both explore personal sexuality, became an important reference point during this series.

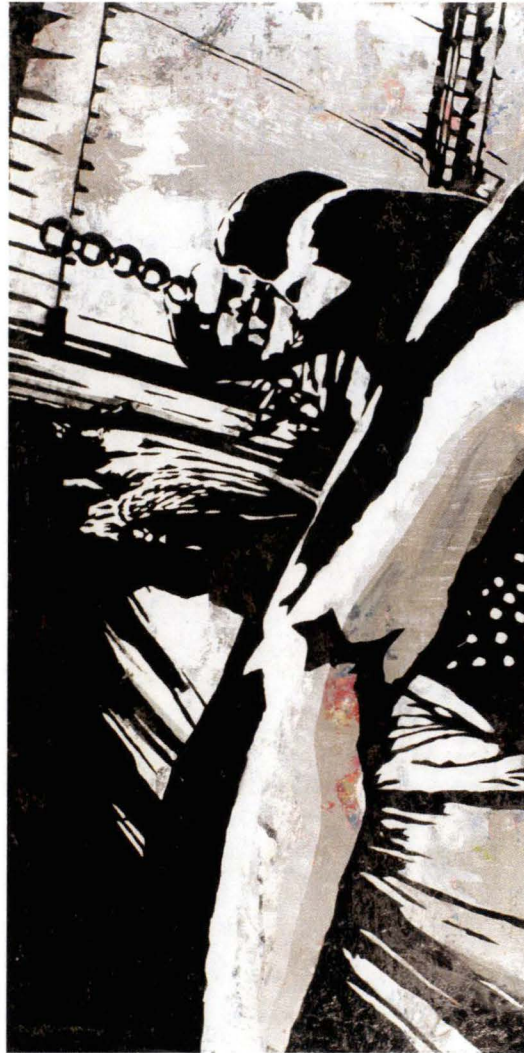
Whilst conventional views about pornography place it outside day to day reality it has cast its shadow across many aspects of people's lives. The recently released study *Understanding Pornography in Australia* estimates that 33 percent of adult Australians use some kind of sexually explicit material annually. This figure (which adds up to about five million people) is comprised of 82 percent men and 18 percent women.<sup>8</sup> If one in three Australians are interacting with pornography then porn really is, by statistical definition, a mainstream activity. For further details of this study refer to Appendix A.

The contents of popular pornography in Australia seems to be doing more than just providing sexual escapism for the men of the community. It appears to be shaping sexual practice and sexual aesthetics as well. With such a large percentage of the population engaged with pornography and the proliferation of porn chic throughout society it is perhaps only logical that pornography has morphed into a form of 'infotainment'. Easy access to pornography via the Internet is providing people in their formative years with images of sexual activity that would have required considerable effort to get hold of a generation ago. They are now just a mouse click away and are often younger people's first contact with the world of sex. The mass consumption of pornography seems to have resulted in a change in attitude towards certain sexual practices. Once considered a taboo act, anal sex is *de rigueur* in pornography today and it is rare to see a penetrative scene in a pornographic movie that does not involve, or culminate, in it. Somewhere in the last decade anal sex has become a standardized part of western sexual behaviour. Possibly this is because people see it as a sign of 'the girl who will go that bit

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<sup>8</sup> Albury, K, Lumby, C & Mckee, A 2008 *The Porn Report* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne pp. 49.

further', fitting in perfectly with the ethos of porn chic and raunch culture. Anal sex and oral sex have even been 'de-sexed' to a certain extent where some people don't view them as anything but a bit of fooling around, totally divorced from sexual intercourse.



Mat Ward      *Anal Fun* 2008 240 x 120cm  
Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium

Popular women's magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* now regularly include articles about anal sex and pornography and their on-line forum is biased towards detailed articles with titles such as *The Hottest Sex Tips on the Planet; Pushing your Booty Boundaries, Red Hot Sex and Anal Sex; I Want*

to Try it.<sup>9</sup> Once relegated to the 'sealed section' they are now included alongside articles about fashion, entertainment and cooking. The two magazines, and many like them, are branded as sexually empowering sources of information and discourse for women.

The topic of sex in the on-line forums has more postings than any other subject, with 15 per cent more than relationships and double the amount of fashion.<sup>10</sup> Discussion of sex is graphic and straight forward, possibly aided by the anonymous nature of the Internet. When talking to women (and reading Internet forums) about anal sex and pornography three things are particularly apparent. First, that the suggestion for this sexual activity almost always comes from their (male) partner; second, the partner had usually come across anal sex watching or discussing porn and; third that pornography, while everywhere, is still not something everyone is personally comfortable with or wants to emulate.

So like many of the women who have posted on here, I am thinking of trying anal sex. My boyfriend asked me about three months ago and I told him I wasn't ready.

He watches a lot of pornography and sometimes expects me to do things like porn stars he doesn't understand I haven't had a million 20 inch "things" stuffed down my throat!

Amen! I totally agree with you "that's just how men are"

Buuuullshit! I think porn is trash too. It's degrading as hell.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Cosmopolitan On-line Magazine* <<http://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/advice/questions/analsex>> first viewed April 18<sup>th</sup> 2008

<sup>10</sup> Nikunen, K 2007 'Cosmo Girls Talk: Blurring the Boundaries of Porn and Sex' in Paasonen, S, Nikunen, K & Saarenmaa, L (eds) 2007 *Pornification; Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture* Oxford/Berg Publishers New York pp. 73-86

<sup>11</sup> *Cosmopolitan On-line Magazine* <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/community> first viewed April 18<sup>th</sup> 2008

These comments, typical of on-line discussions, show another face of pornification; that everyone is aware of it and even accepts it, but they don't necessarily embrace it personally. These conversations do, however, indicate how prevalent pornography is in their lives and to a degree how it affects their relationships and sex lives.

While pornography does present a large array of body types its emphasis on big breasts, skinny waists and 'tidy' vaginas inevitably invites comparison between what is on the screen and the individual watching it. In this way the presence of pornography in everyday life has been linked to increasing body augmentation. Body augmentation ranges from the relatively (but extremely prevalent) innocuous removal of pubic hair through various cosmetic procedures culminating in what is known as 'vaginal rejuvenation'. This trendy title suggests surgery that might help to regain some of what age and childbirth has taken away. Tightening of the vaginal muscles (vaginoplasty) is a medical procedure that has been around for forty years, but in recent years it has turned into a purely cosmetic surgery, morphing into what is now called labiaplasty. This is simply altering the appearance of the vagina to make it look 'tidier' and hence more like what you see in pornography. The practice has been described by critics as a modern form of female genital mutilation which ignores the diversity of the female form in favour of an unreal physical aesthetic. There is an increasing trend towards younger women seeking vaginoplasty and labiaplasty.

But rejuvenation isn't only the realm of mothers and grown women. Many teenage seek the help of doctors in reducing the size of their labia. Dr Matlock has operated on a 14 year old girl who was accompanied by her parents and her younger sister. "Mothers are in 100 per cent support" said the doctor. Speaking about the physical development of young teens , Matlock said "These are mature young ladies. If they weren't I wouldn't do it".<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.cosmeticsurgeryaustralia.com.au/vaginalrejuvenation\\_article.htm](http://www.cosmeticsurgeryaustralia.com.au/vaginalrejuvenation_article.htm) first viewed 2 September 2008



Most of the younger women we used to see were what I call the professionals – the pole dancers, the strippers, whose parts have to be in good shape because it's part of their act. Besides them, the other women were housewives in their 30's and 40's who had had a few bubs and felt they needed it. But now the typical patient was a successful, unmarried young woman in her 20's or early 30's who simply didn't like what she had.<sup>13</sup>

For men that can't find a women with the 'correct' looking vagina, porn stars such as Jenna Jameson and Nina Hartley have released sex toys that are anatomically correct replicas of their own private parts.



Jenna Jameson vagina and arse

The rise of Jenna Jameson from porn starlet to multi million dollar business woman perhaps exemplifies the phenomenon of pornification better than any other example. Jameson, referred to as the Queen of Porn, first started appearing in porn movies in the mid 1990s as a way of increasing her visibility as an erotic dancer. By 1996 she had won three major awards from the pornographic film industry and was considered the most bankable star of her time. Jameson's first move into the mainstream started with a job on

<sup>13</sup> 'Young women seeking vagina surgery' 17<sup>th</sup> August 2007  
<http://www.thewest.com.au/aapstory.aspx?StoryName=37217> first viewed 2 September 2008

shock jock Howard Stern's high rating radio show, she was advertised as the 'first nude woman on radio' and became an instant hit. She then appeared as herself in his semi-autobiographical movie *Private Parts*, and as a guest reporter on E! cable television, usually dressed in a bikini. There is no doubting Jameson's media saviness and desire for popularity outside the world of porn: "I have always embraced my hard-core roots, but becoming a house-hold name was an important thing to me".<sup>14</sup>

As Jameson's status rose in mainstream media she consolidated her position in the porn world by co-founding, with her husband, *Club Jenna*, one of the first Internet porn sites to expand beyond the standard photography and video clips that were typical of the day. *Club Jenna* offered club members adult products, personal diary entries, relationship advice and other merchandise. The site's profitability was evident within three weeks of its launch. *Club Jenna* then moved into producing and managing websites for other porn stars. By 2005 Jameson had ceased appearing in porn movies to concentrate on her business empire. *Club Jenna* was estimated to have made 15 million dollars profit in that year.<sup>15</sup> The financial success of her business brought media attention and this in turn propelled her, rapidly, towards celebrity status stardom. She was inundated with offers to endorse products, appear at public functions and be interviewed on television and radio. Every public appearance was conducted in a minimal amount of clothing and featured plenty of references to sex. The diversity of these activities is notable, everything from starring as herself on the animated comedy series *Family Guy* in 2001; debating at *Oxford College* in 2002 and; providing the voice for the character *Candy Suxx* in the mega selling *Playstation 2* video game *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*.

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<sup>14</sup> Miller, M 2005 'The (Porn) Player' *Forbes Magazine* 4<sup>th</sup> July 2005

<sup>15</sup> Higginbotham, A 2004 'The Porn Broker' *Telegraph Magazine* 9th October 2004



Jenna Jameson in *Family Guy* and on *The Howard Stern Show*

Jameson has also worked for prominent retailers such as *Adidas* footwear, *Pony International* clothing and *Jackson* guitars and has developed her own brand of high-end merchandise-perfume, lingerie, handbags, clothing and footwear. *Club Jenna* expanded its business into live entertainment in 2005 with the purchase of strip clubs. It targeted the gay market with the launch of *Club Thrust*, an interactive website site based on *Club Jenna*, featuring advice, gay news, merchandise and, of course, pornographic imagery.<sup>16</sup>

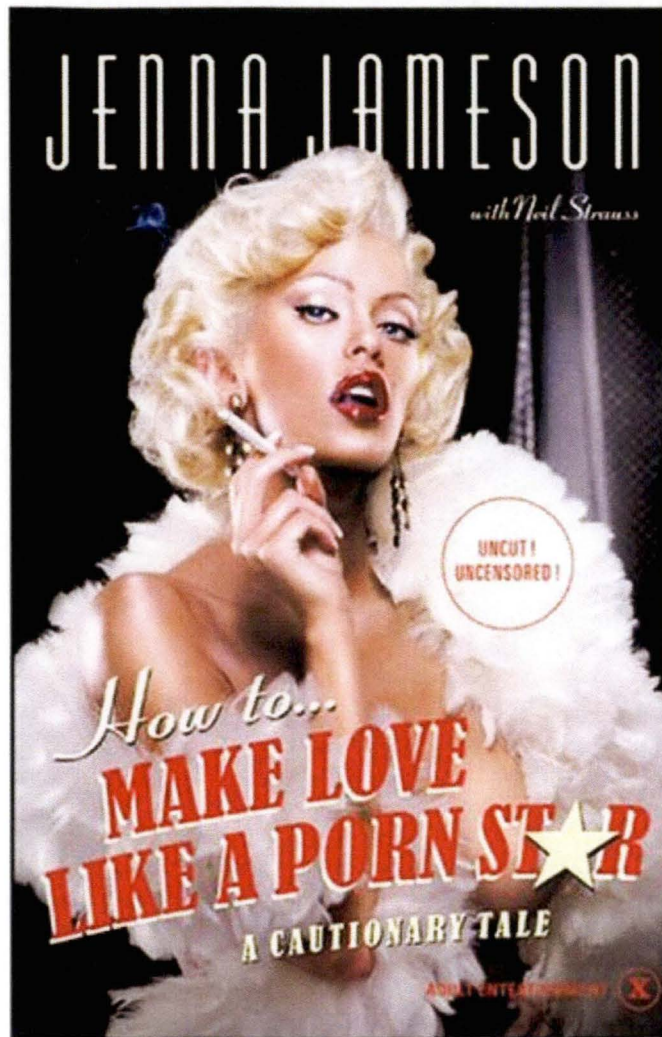
The true extent of the public's fascination with Jameson, and by extension with pornography, became evident in 2004 when she released her autobiography. Titled *How To Make Love Like A Porn Star; A Cautionary Tale*<sup>17</sup> it rose to number one on the *New York Times* Best Seller List and stayed there for six weeks.<sup>18</sup>

The book, nearly 600 pages in length, describes Jameson's life - from childhood through her decision to become an erotic dancer, to her first foray into nude photography and her rise to fame as a porn star.

<sup>16</sup> Hein, K 2006 'Marketers Test The Line Between Porn and P.C' *Brandweek* 8<sup>th</sup> September 2004

<sup>17</sup> Jameson, J 2004 *How to Make Love Like A Porn Star; A Cautionary Tale* Regan Books New York

<sup>18</sup> Higginbotham, A *op.cit.*



Jacket Cover for *How To Make Love*

*Like A Porn Star; A Cautionary Tale*

In style, the book is honest and forthright, documenting episodes of drug addiction, violence and depression. These tales of despair are inter-spliced with glossy naked photos, comic strips and scanned pages from her personal diaries. Following the book's release, Jameson embarked on a publicity tour identical to that of any Hollywood celebrity. She appeared on commercial television stations CNN, CNBC, Fox and NBC and numerous radio stations across the United States and appeared at book signings, department stores and photo opportunities. Whilst critical reviews of the book were fairly dismissive of her literary talent (as they generally are of any celebrity writing their memoirs) the general public was nevertheless fascinated and bought the book in droves. It was promptly translated into German and Spanish.



Jameson's position in contemporary culture is an outstanding example of how far pornography has integrated itself into the daily fabric of society. Since first appearing in soft core magazines in the early 1990s she has been the feature in more than 1000 articles, appeared on more than 400 magazine covers and her images have been downloaded from the Internet millions of times. In January 2008 Jenna officially retired from making pornography in preparation for the birth of her first child.



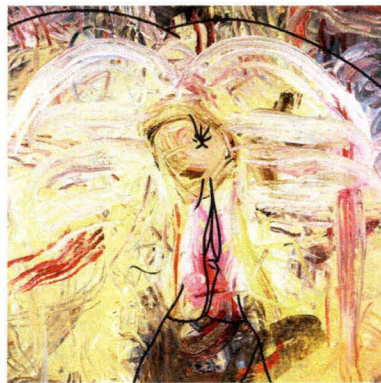
*There Goes The Neighbourhood* 2008 220 cm x 240 cm  
Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium

## Home Made Porn

The third phase of my candidature investigates how people produce and consume their own sexually explicit imagery. The paintings of Marcus Harvey were of particular importance to the development of this series, specifically his paintings of the 1990s, which through re-appropriated home made pornography, explore the world of do-it-yourself porn.



Marcus Harvey *Golden Showers*



Marcus Harvey *My Arse is Yours*

Both Works 1994 244 x 244 cm Oil and Acrylic on Canvas

Home made and amateur pornography has been around along time. Privately viewed paintings of the Renaissance, designed specifically as sexual stimulants, Victorian gentlemen's photography and the self developed Polaroid of the 1970s are examples. For as long as people have been making images they have been making sexual imagery, often for private use. Before the arrival of the Internet, imagery was usually published in cheap magazines or swapped between like-minded people. The World Wide Web has changed all that with amateur sights proliferating across the Internet at breakneck speed, in numbers that outstrip the 'professional' websites by far.<sup>19</sup> The popularity of amateur pornography has seen the rise of other strains of similar pornography including gonzo porn (professionally produced porn made to look amateurish, often involving no plot, just sex), voyeuristic porn (imagery captured in public of a sexual nature) and celebrity porn (showing the private

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.usatoday.com/tech/techinvestor/industry/2007-06-05-internet-porn\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/tech/techinvestor/industry/2007-06-05-internet-porn_N.htm)  
first viewed 15th September 2007



sexual activity of famous people, which ‘mysteriously’ ends up in the public domain).

Homemade pornography is important to this investigation, as it shows how the general pornification of culture is not just confined to the flashy world of advertising or teenage fashion. The production of home made sexual imagery, is rapidly expanding - a reflection of the overall proliferation of pornography in our society. It also highlights the different reasons individuals use pornography, in particular as a means of self-expression and sexual exploration, divorced from market forces or accepted methods of sexual display.

The aesthetics of do-it-yourself porn (DIY porn) commonly feature poor lighting, badly cropped and out of focus imagery, ordinary domestic settings, and in the case of moving imagery, substandard audio and editing. There is usually little effort put into hiding the participants’ ‘flaws’ or social status. Catherine Lumby describes this in *The Porn Report*.<sup>20</sup>

Hands with wedding rings (his and hers) are visible in two of the pictures...The couple is posed in ‘doggie style’ position (both fully clothed), both smiling. She looks slightly downward and ahead; he turns his head to smile at the camera. Both have what could be described as having ‘average’ looks: he has a bit of a belly; she has stretch marks on her thighs and buttocks.<sup>21</sup>



Example of professional and amateur pornographic aesthetics

<sup>20</sup> Lumby, C, Mckee, A & Albury, K *op.cit.* pp. 128-129.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

The 'average' looks, smiling faces, wedding rings and other features are all important factors in establishing an aesthetic that suggests reality over fantasy. Herein lies one of the major reasons for the popularity of amateur porn, it is a medium where people can easily imagine themselves.

A lot of internet webcam sites have become very popular, because people like the factor of seeing someone who is not a paid porn star getting their gear off or having sex with somebody ...I think it's kind of like the girl next door factor- they don't really know who it is, but they like the fact that it could be someone they walk past in the supermarket or someone who lives down the street ...The biggest growth in porn in the last ten years has been in the amateur area; the others are pretty much maxed out.<sup>22</sup>

The production and consumption of amateur porn is also used as a form of sexual expression and community building. The world of professional pornography is male orientated and conspicuously heterosexual. Amateur porn sites offer alternatives, with specific chapters dedicated to all forms of sexual preference such as chubby wives, husbands with small dicks, bondage lesbians, nature lovers, old gay men etc. Most of these sites are interactive, allowing the viewer to upload their own imagery and even make contact with the participants on-line. Through this like-minded people, often sexually marginalized, can communicate with each other, sharing stories and building a sense of community while participating in the consumption of sexually arousing imagery.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 132





Source photo from [www.gimpsonewild.com](http://www.gimpsonewild.com) and *Handicapable* 2008

120 x 60 cm Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium

This phenomena has been referred to as the ‘democratization of pornography’.<sup>23</sup>

The production of amateur pornography also points towards an embrace of pornography by women. A quick survey of any amateur porn site shows women and couples photo shoots outnumber all other genres on display. This challenges some of the notions that pornography is a tool of patriarchy. Anti-porn feminist debate in the 1970s focused on pornography as an exploitation of women with such polarizing catch phrases as ‘pornography is the theory, rape is the practice’.<sup>24</sup> This debate raged through the 1980s effectively splitting feminism into pro and anti sex contingents. Recent debate about raunch culture and porn chic as reflected by writers Ariel Levy and Niaomi Wolfe also contain a hint of this ‘women as victims of porn’ sentiment. Amateur porn differs considerably from the pornography usually upheld by the anti-porn feminists. There are no directors, budgets, specific sexual requirements or profit in DIY porn, distinguishing it from the adult

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2003/nov/03/broadcasting.tvandradio1> first viewed 8 April 2005

<sup>24</sup> Morgan, R 1974 *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist - Theory and Practice: Pornography and Rape*, Random House New York

entertainment industry and the starlets that specialize in male fantasy. It is hard to find any trace of oppression or exploitation in a photo-shoot that was produced, designed, and distributed by a female, of herself, from her own home. Of course, some people view any involvement with porn, amateur or otherwise as conformity to a repressive patriarchal culture. An alternative view would perhaps suggest that participation in porn is an individual undertaking, and may arise from any number of motivations.

Rather than the come-hither eyes we associate with pornography, we are more likely to find grins and laughter on the faces of those involved in amateur porn. The notion of 'sex as fun' is pivotal to home made porn and allows the participants to explore sexuality free of politics and bias. Whilst anti- porn feminist theory may argue convincingly that representations of sexually submissive women are oppressive and sexist, amateur porn provides an arena for transgressive and experimental behaviour between consenting adults. Sexual identity is an enormously complex area. Within any one person's sexual identity there are aspects that don't neatly fall into categories such as dominant/submissive, straight/gay or voyeur/exhibitionist, and these aspects of sexuality are prominent in amateur porn, where the participants and consumer are both aware of the consensual nature of the sexual activity.

In his study, Slater<sup>25</sup> found that female participants particularly appreciated the Internet as a place where they could 'explore desires which are taboo, embarrassing or dangerous for off-line life: mainly bisexuality, exhibitionism, group sex and promiscuity'. This finding was supported by a study done by Australian researchers Marj Kibby and Bronwyn Costello<sup>26</sup> of a heterosexual webcam exhibitionist site which, they argue, allowed not only a space for female sexual experimentation and exhibitionism, but formed a community that supported women's voyeuristic desire to be sexually entertained by men.

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<sup>25</sup> Miller, D, Rival, L, Slater, D, 1998 ' Sex and Sociality: Comparative Ethnographies of Sexual Objectification' *Theory, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 15, nos 3& 4 pp.295-301

<sup>26</sup> Costello, B, Kibby, M 2001 ' Between the Image and the Act: Interactive Sex Entertainment on the Internet', *Sexualities*, Vol. 4, no. 3 pp. 353-369

In addition, it offered a space for men to perform as eroticized objects of female desire.<sup>27</sup>

Whether as an arena for sexual expression, a means to connect with other people or just some old fashioned voyeurism, amateur porn is being produced and consumed more than any other form of sexually explicit imagery. Of the top twenty most viewed porn sites (with over 100 million individual hits per day between them) four of them are dedicated to amateur porn.<sup>28</sup> The four websites all provide space for the users to talk about themselves and interact if they desire to do so. The sheer range of body types, socio-economic backgrounds, sexual preferences and aesthetic styles is broad, something fairly uncommon in commercially produced pornography.

The rise of amateur porn reflects a culture that is increasingly focused on sex and sexuality. It provides a means for people to participate in the pornification of culture but retain full control over the way representations of their sexuality are seen. Whilst our public spaces are dominated by a visual façade that relies on airbrushing, silicon and sexual stereotypes the embrace of DIY pornography by porn consumers provides a new aesthetic; one that is diverse, playful and self-directed.

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<sup>27</sup> Lumby, C, Mckee, A & Albury, K *op.cit.*, pp. 133

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.68

## **Content Summary**

The diverse subject matter explored in this project is indicative of how far pornography has integrated itself into mainstream culture. At all levels of society, pornography is prevalent. Fashion, entertainment, self-expression, sexual identity and socialization are all to some degree influenced by pornography. The research followed three main strains of inquiry: porn-chic, pornification and amateur pornography, which resulted in a broad overview of where pornography currently sits within culture. It highlights how pornography is a healthy and even progressive part of many peoples lives, used to explore and enjoy sexuality. It also revealed that although pornography has become a persuasive cultural informer it is not necessarily personally embraced by individuals, and remains problematic for many people. Of particular concern was the influence that pornography had on men's sexual expectations of women and its effect on body image.

The research suggests the true place of pornography in contemporary life is one of fascination and fashionability. Porn is trendy, resulting in many people accepting pornography's tropes and ideas even though they may be personally uncomfortable and even affronted with what pornography has to offer.

## **CONTEXT**

### **Introduction**

This project is located in the field of creating and investigating sexual imagery. Of particular relevance are the painters Marcus Harvey and Richard Larter, both of whom have produced large bodies of work concerning sexually explicit imagery and its representation in contemporary culture. Authors Cathy Lumby, Ariel Levy and Susanna Paaeson have provided detailed analysis of pornography's assimilation into mainstream culture and been pivotal in my critique of the phenomenon. Many other artists have also had an influence on this thesis, some conceptually others formally. These include Jasper Goodall, Eric Fischl, Lisa Yuskavage, Francis Picabia and David LaChapelle.

The following chapter divides the project into five key areas of conceptual concern. The first four sections discuss the practice of specific artists and their relevance to this project. The fifth section looks at contemporary literary discussion on sexual culture, pornography and sexuality.

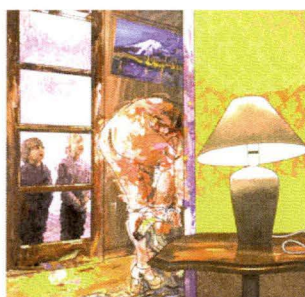
## Pornography as Source Material

This project is connected to pornography not just through its investigation of the pornification of culture but also through its formal use of pornographic imagery. Many of the paintings use pornography as source imagery, which is manipulated and then re-presented in paint. It is also indebted to 'porn chic' - the imagery in culture that references pornography as part of its aesthetic. Contemporary advertising and music videos are two prominent examples that utilize porn chic in their visual language. The most influential artist on my current practice is the English painter Marcus Harvey. His work is relevant for his use of both pornography as subject matter (in particular amateur or homemade pornography) and his content - the private world of sexuality and how it crosses into the public domain.



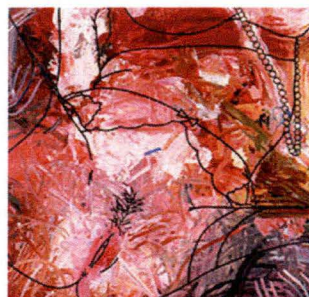
*I Aim to Please* 1996

244 x 244 cm



*Study For A Peeping Tom* 2000

200 x 200 cm



*Julie From Hull* 1994

213 x 213 cm

All Works oil and acrylic on Canvas

Harvey was born in Leeds in 1963 and first came to public notice through his infamous portrait of child serial killer Myra Hindley; a monochromatic painting composed of children's handprints (referencing the child victims of Hindley's killing spree), first exhibited in Saatchi's groundbreaking *Sensations* exhibition in 1997. For Harvey the picture was about the tabloid press and the power of images rather than a direct comment on Hindley herself. His first solo-show at White Cube Gallery in London, called *Snaps*, featured a collection of large-scale works (all over 200 x 200 cm) that used amateur pornographic photography as source material. As the title suggests,



the paintings are based on snapshots of sexualised bodies, cropped at roughly genital height, bringing the focus to crotches and anuses.



*Readers Wife* 1994 213 x 213 cm Oil and Acrylic on Canvas

Harvey is interested in non-professional pornography, a form that differs considerably from mainstream notions of pornography, and how individuals project their sexuality into the public arena. Harvey's painting methods, too, have influenced decisions within my project. His paintings are an energetic but controlled mixture of impasto surfaces, ultra tight line work, interconnecting blocks of tone and colour, pattern and careful composition. He homogenizes extremely rough imagery and produces exquisite paintings that embellish the sexiness of the subject and make the content more palatable to the public.

Harvey's paintings reveal much about pornography's seductive appeal and inability to truly satisfy desire.<sup>29</sup> There is a clumsy, naïve and tragic-comic edge to these works. They are full of the promise of flesh and sex but tacky and banal, like much of the sexual imagery we see in public. Harvey's use of pornography, has provoked questions about the objectification of the female body in art. Post-modern criticism has dismissed the notion that fine art is somehow above the base instincts of voyeurism and visual titillation. Harvey's open use of cropped female body parts, homogenized into captivating luscious paintings asks the viewer to acknowledge both their abjectness and beauty.

Marcus Harvey manages to have his cake and eat it. On the one hand his paintings are an orgy of unrestrained sensuality; on the other, an indirect indictment of the illustrious history of the nude. His acceptance of the polymorphous perversity of infancy in which all tactile impulses are equal - his work equates eating, excreting, art-making and love-making – provokes some basic questions. What, for instance, is the difference between Velasquez caressing, with a fine sable brush, the rosy buttocks of his *Rokeby Venus*, de Kooning ravaging the contours of his castrating nudes, Harvey's orgiastic gropings, and the masturbatory consumption of pornographic pictures? All these images stem from and invite sexual responses, the difference being the degree to which this is acknowledged. Pornography is blatant in its reduction of flesh to objecthood; high art is more circumspect. By creating a clash between the two cultures, Harvey equates art with pornography and, according to one's viewpoint, either damns or exonerates them both.<sup>30</sup>

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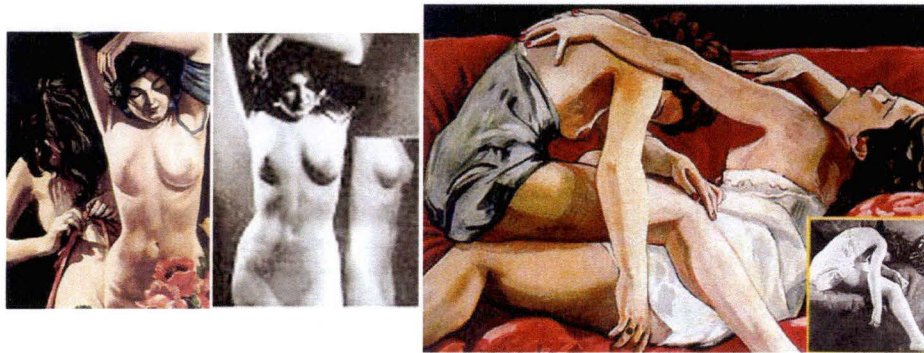
<sup>29</sup> Moylan, C.2002 'Chris Moylan on Marcus Harvey' *Art Critical* Spring 2002  
<http://www.artcritical.com/moylan/CMHarvey.htm> First viewed September 14th 2006

<sup>30</sup> Kent, S 1994, *Shark Infested Waters: The Saatchi Collection of British Art in the 90's*, Zwemmer Publishing, London



Harvey's use of pornography as source material allows him to explore the contemporary relationship between the sexual image and sexuality while engaging with the history of erotic art making. His paintings give voice to the desires of people to expose themselves and be consumed as sexual objects as well as his own attraction and relationship to pornography.

The use of pornography as subject matter or source material has long been a tradition in the visual arts. An earlier example can be found in the late works of French artist Francis Picabia (1879-1953). In the 1940s, after an eclectic career embracing artistic experimentation, Picabia produced a series of works copied from black and white photos of young naked women.



*Deux Femmes au Pavots* 1942 and *Deux Amies* 1941

Oil on Cardboard Francis Picabia

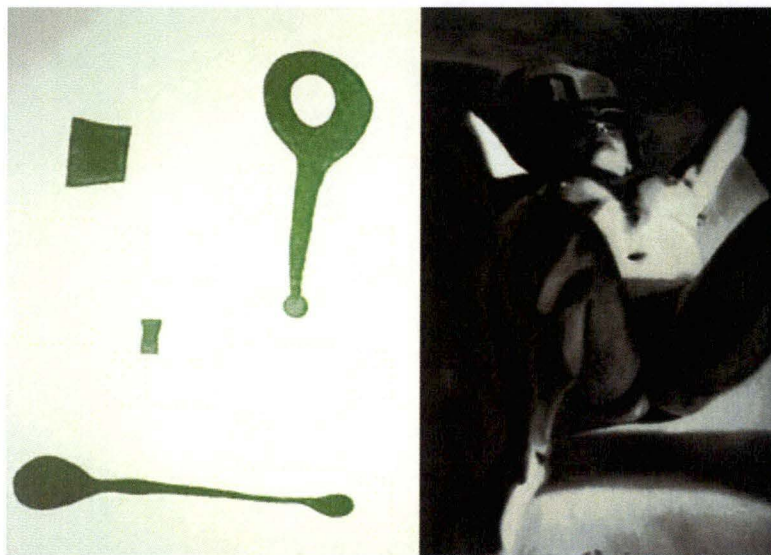
Original photography and finished paintings

The paintings acknowledge their photographic origins, the rendering is flattened and the artist has maintained the harsh lighting associated with the photographic image. The pictures explore the difference between photography and painting with the distorted angles and cropping of the photos unaltered in the finished works.<sup>31</sup> This suite of paintings was, for a long time, dismissed as cheap sensationalism by art critics but gained recognition through its influence on postmodernist artists such as Sigmund Polke and David Salle in the 1980s. Picabia's concerns parallel those of Harvey in their questioning of the alleged moral basis of modern art; the

<sup>31</sup> Kunitz, D 2000 'Francis Picabia: Late Paintings', *Foundation for Cultural Review* June 1 <http://www.highbeam.com/newcriterion/publications> First viewed April 20<sup>th</sup> 2007

paintings resemble classicism but are openly based on throwaway imagery. His voyeurism and objectification of the female figure is, like Harvey's, fully acknowledged in the production of his work.

The art of David Salle (b.1959) is, too, highly indebted to Picabia's painterly experimentation, specifically in his use of harsh tones, the rendering of which reference photographs. His use of sexual imagery is, however, viewed as more problematic. Salle, avoiding the criticism about the voyeuristic nature of his imagery, skirts the question of sexist representation by speaking only of his work in formal terms.

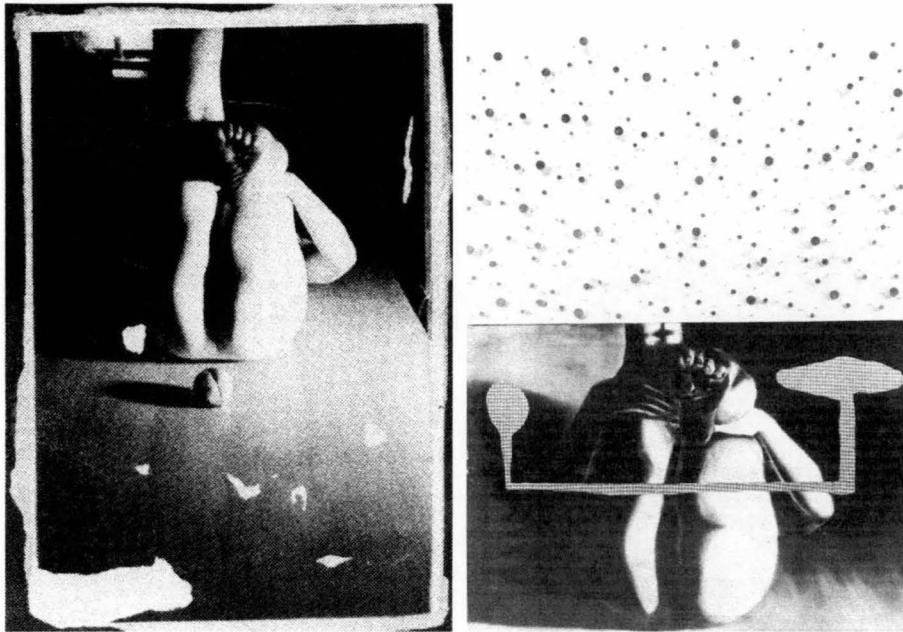


David Salle *The Bigger Credenza* 1985 176 x 380 cm  
Oil, Acrylic and Fabric on Canvas

He argues that his use of pornography is less about the erotic and more about treating the body as just another shape or object, like those such as cars, furniture, buildings and animals which he juxtaposes against his figures.<sup>32</sup> Salle claims there is no intrinsic meaning or relationship between the objects in his paintings; his images are, he declares, abstractions, 'things devoid of meaning' including those of the female nude.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Rosenblum, R 2003 'David Salle talks to Robert Rosenblum ('80s Then)' *Artforum International* March 1.  
[http://www.thefreelibrary.com//David+Salle+talks+to+Robert+Rosenblum.+\('80s+Then\)](http://www.thefreelibrary.com//David+Salle+talks+to+Robert+Rosenblum.+('80s+Then))  
First viewed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2007

<sup>33</sup> Kivinen, K 2002, 'David Salle Interview' <http://kiasma.fi/site/pop.pop.php=lang> First viewed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2008



David Salle *The Disappearance of the Booming Voice* 1984

260 x 185cm Acrylic and Fabric on Canvas

Source material and finished painting

While this commodification of the sexually explicit body is evident in the work of Harvey, Picabia and Salle their intentions seem quite different. Salle appears to enjoy shock-value and in its objectification, presents the female body as an interchangeable commodity. Picabia's output of the 1940s in an investigation into the differences between painting and photography, and also raises interesting questions concerning morality in modernist art. Harvey uses pornography to explore the intersection of private and public sexuality and how individuals express and play with their sexual identity, in everyday life.

Harvey's, Salle's and other contemporary painters, like John Currin, use of explicit sexual imagery sits easily within the sexualized culture of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, where the proliferation of explicit sexual imagery is rife.

The examination of the pornification of culture is most thoroughly documented in Susanna Paasonen's 2007 book *Pornification; Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture*<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> Paasonen, S 2007, in Paasonen, S, Nikunen, K & Saarenmaa, L (eds) 2007 *Pornification; Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture* Oxford/Berg Publishers New York

The sexualization of culture refers to a fairly wide range of cultural phenomena while pornification is a more specific term pointing to the increased visibility of hardcore and soft-core pornographies, and the blurring of boundaries between pornographic and the mainstream. McNair (2002,61) identifies such increase in sexually explicit representations as porno chic: involving the depictions of pornography in non-pornographic contexts in art and culture; pastiche or parody of porn; homage to porn or explorations into it and the incorporation of porn into mainstream cultural products.<sup>35</sup>

Many, it seems, from commercial media through to visual artists are borrowing from pornography. In the process, the relationship between mainstream and illicit has become somewhat blurred.

The relationship between porn and the mainstream media can be seen as symbiotic. By covering porn, the media borrows some of its dirty glamour and sense of danger, while in turn it confers legitimacy, making porn a topic of interest and discussion like any other.<sup>36</sup>

### **The Private Goes Public**

The breakdown of the public and private spheres is an often explored area within the visual arts. Marcus Harvey's paintings are a good example of how the private world of sexuality is increasingly crossing over into the public realm; both the subjects of his paintings and the paintings themselves seek a space in the public arena.

The Australian Painter Richard Larter, working some decades before Harvey, was also interested in exploring homemade sexualized imagery through his work. I was fortunate to view Larter's paintings in the 2006

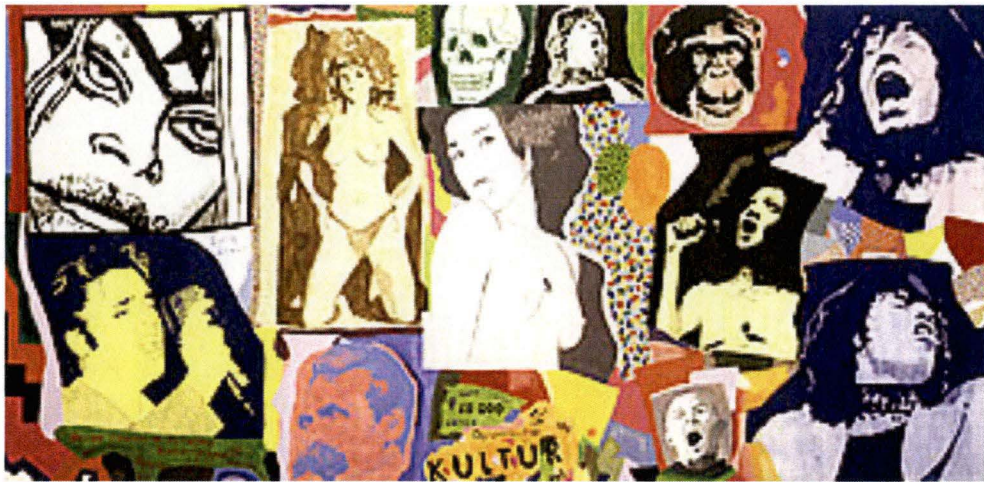
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<sup>35</sup> Paasonen, *Ibid.* Publishing New York

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



touring show *Larter Family Values* at the Plimsoll Gallery in Hobart. Larter was born in Essex in 1929 and emigrating to Australia in 1962. He quickly became a leading voice in contemporary Australian art. His paintings spanned a considerable amount of conceptual and formal territory and included a large percentage of works addressing sexuality and the sexual image, particularly in the extremely revealing paintings of his artistic collaborator and partner Pat Larter.



Richard Larter *Cream filling; phew, finger ring* 1971 178 x 336cm  
Synthetic Polymer Paint on Canvas

Larter, painting in the late sixties, was somewhat of a political radical and vehemently opposed to censorship. He saw a massive hypocrisy in society's acceptance of violence, mass industrialization and capitalism while it refused to explore the virtues of sex and sexuality.

I notice we dissect cars, guns, and other boring machines,  
and peer at diagrams of their interiors- how sick. Repression  
always leads to violence- just look at our society. It's okay to  
thump your wife, but disgusting to look at her vulva.<sup>37</sup>

Larter's work is both political and personal, his highly intimate paintings of his wife question cultural values, in particular our discomfort with public

<sup>37</sup> Mendelssohn, J 2006 Interview with the author *Larter Family Values* Casula/Liverpool Publishing Sydney

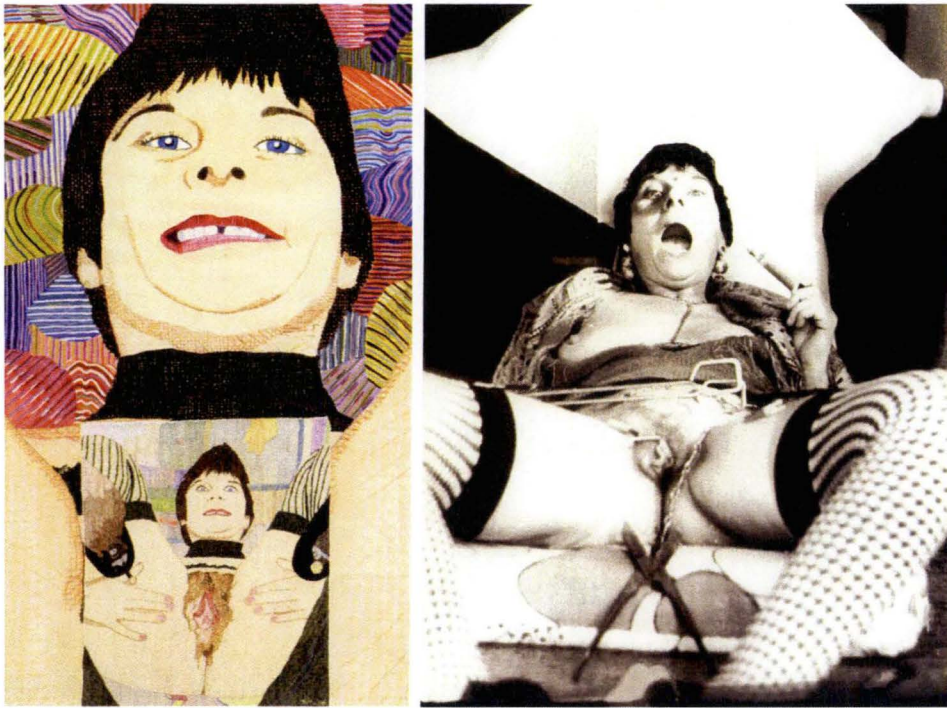
displays of sexuality. While the 1960s are sometimes romantically referred to as the 'swinging sixties' Australia was an extremely conservative place, even in contemporary art circles, with women still highly marginalized in many aspects of society. Exposing the private sexuality of women was one step along the path towards sexual and cultural liberation.

The evening news in the 1960s and 1970's was as bleak as it is today. The war in Vietnam, the massacre of children, the folly of the ultimate weapon of mass destruction- The Nuclear Bomb- all aided and abetted by politicians. So Richard painted them as "Nay Sayers", negative forces whose evil could be countered by Pat, whose sexual potency made her the ultimate "Yay Sayer".<sup>38</sup>

I find personal resonance in Larter's, at times, simplistic take on contemporary culture and politics. Part of my fascination with pornography is a belief that there is an intrinsic beauty in visual expressions of sex. They contain a mixture of erotic allure and political voice. Much as changed in visual culture since Larter first started exhibiting paintings of Pat Larter in sexually provocative positions, yet there is still a taboo that equates explicit sexuality with moral corruptness. It is an established fact of western culture that images of violence are seen as far more acceptable than images of sex.

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

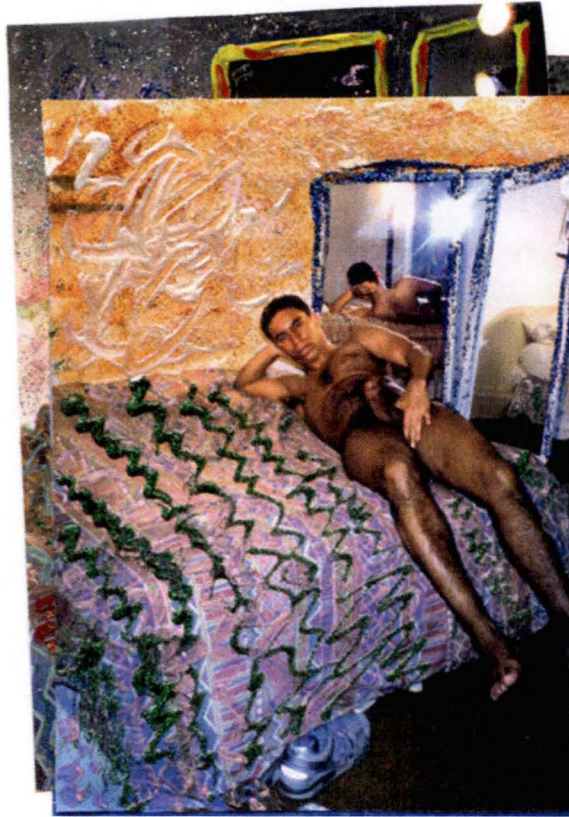


*Richard Larter Two Pats 1983 106 x 181 cm*

Acrylic on Canvas with Source Material

Humour is an important tool in the breaking down of social taboos and this is a prominent device in Larter's work. There is an emphasis on how sex can be fun and enjoyable. Pat Larter's artistic output was as equally confronting as her partners. By exposing herself to the public (as she did through imagery and performance) she challenged the idea of patriarchy dictating her sexual make-up. Her work explores issues of sexual politics and objectification. Her photo collages of naked men question the negative aspects of objectification by offering the chance to both display and observe the male body as a purely sexual object.





Pat Larter *Experiment for Collage of Naked Men*  
1995 180 x 120 cm Mixed Media

Our culture appears to be dissolving the line between the public and private worlds at a rate of knots. Reality television, glossy magazines full of personal confessions, self-publication on the Internet and a fascination with the idea of being famous (even if its for doing nothing) are so ubiquitous in our society that they barely raise an eyebrow. My work is part of this cultural phenomenon.

Of major importance to the investigation of the relationship between the private and public domains is American painter Eric Fischl. His exploration of the suburban landscape, both physical and psychological, presents the viewer with domestic, and personal sexual, narratives.





*Bad Boy* 1981 205 x 240 cm Oil on Canvas

Fischl's work deals with the private world of sexuality that sits uncomfortably within the public arena. The intense voyeuristic underpinning of many of his paintings makes the audience complicit in the visual violation of the private space.

It was the timing, the deft nearly comic timing that first drew me to the work of Eric Fischl. It was the thing about to happen, the act implied but not illustrated, the menacing relations between family members that make Eric Fischl's paintings disturbing. It was the way he forced the viewer to fill in the blanks, to answer the question: what exactly is going on here. In the early work invariably the answer was sex; first sex, illicit sex, weird sex, seeing or touching something you shouldn't, rubbing up against the taboos of familial flesh, interracial relations, etc; the kind of things you've considered but aren't necessarily willing to admit.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Homes, A 1995, 'Eric Fischl' *Bomb Magazine* Issue 50, Winter, pp. 14-28

Fischl locates his work most often in the home where furniture, wall fixings and pot plants act as silent witnesses to the human narrative. There is a sense of drabness and the mundane in his imagery.

Like Harvey and Larter, Fischl is participating in the breakdown of the boundary between public and private by displaying intimacy in the public domain. His subjects however are anything but comfortable with the gaze of the public. The artist's ability to highlight their awkwardness and vulnerability is central to his intention to show the uneasy path towards understanding sexuality and self. This embodied experience of sex sharply contrasts the pornification of culture we see in the public arena through advertising and entertainment, where everything is fun, available and devoid of consequence.

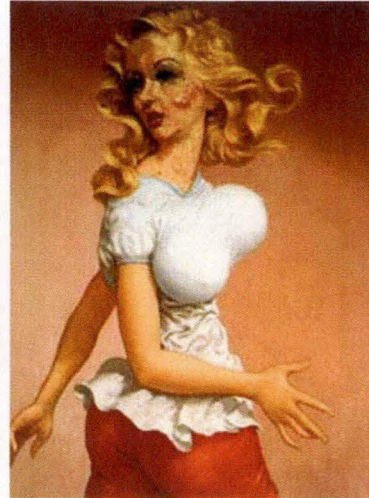
### **Defiance and Transgression**

Sexual imagery, even though it surrounds us on a daily basis, still has the ability to ruffle people's feathers. Art that steps over the boundaries of acceptable taste is often referred to as transgressive art. Fischl's art is such an example. His work explores the grey area between acceptable and unacceptable sexual urges. In order to understand his work the viewer is forced to admit an empathy with the desires of the protagonists in the paintings. Denial is impossible, unless the audience really is as pure as the driven snow.

John Currin and Lisa Yuskavage are two contemporary painters whose imagery has affronted many gallery goers. Their rendering of the female body, grotesquely distorted beyond even the pumped up silicon girls of *Penthouse* and porn, has little in common with the covert presentations of sexuality that Fischl offers. These paintings are lurid, defiant and brash. Both artists have polished technical prowess underpinning their work, that is visually seductive and intellectually repelling at the same time.



Lisa Yuskavage *NorthView* 2001 139 x 124 cm  
Oil on Linen



John Currin *Twisting Girl* 1997  
130 x 96 cm Oil on Canvas

Currin and Yuskavage both came to prominence in the early 1990s as part of a return to figuration in painting. Their work parodies the sexy female stereotype we see in advertising and pornography. A quick Internet search shows how affronting the artwork of these two painters is to many people. Yet, though condemned as tasteless, sensationalist and even as untalented painters, the publicity has in no way hurt either of their careers.

The paintings are disingenuous in the way they are presented. I've read a few quotes by Yuskavage to the effect that "these things are what I hate about myself" and "I am exploring my sexuality". But the fact is, they're also 100 percent marketable. I think it is somewhat disingenuous to use the language of early 1970s feminism if you make images that are soft porn. Everybody knows they're soft porn, because that's the first thing everyone says about them.<sup>40</sup>

Currin didn't even have the talent or vision to photograph models to base his erotic works upon, instead he turned to an ignoble source. But for an artist who places so much

<sup>40</sup> Jones, A 2007 'Lisa Yuskavage; Critiquing Prurient Sexuality or Disingenuously Peddling a Soft-Porn Aesthetic?' *Washington Post* April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007

importance on irony, there is no biting wit to be found in these porn inspired paintings; Currin has simply revealed his weakness, he may have technical ability as a painter- but he is devoid of the heart necessary to offer us anything worth knowing. There are undoubtedly those who will find some type of profundity in Currin's attempt at reshaping porn into high art- but all we see is empty, soulless, anti-humanist post-modern nonsense.<sup>41</sup>

Comments, like these, about Currin and Yuskavage appear regularly. Personally I find it somewhat disingenuous that anyone could view their paintings and not be forced to consider the broader issues behind them. Interestingly, neither Currin or Yuskavage see themselves as transgressive in any fashion. Currin's recent paintings, copied from 1970s pornography have caused a big stir when exhibited in North America. He refers to his use of porn as source material as completely in step with contemporary culture.<sup>42</sup>

The transgression in the paintings of Currin and Yuskavage is two-fold. Firstly, their work challenges accepted boundaries of taste concerning the portrayal of the sexualized body and on a deeper level their art transgresses the conventional modes of discourse used in critiquing contemporary culture.

The very notion of transgression in contemporary culture is debatable given the rapid commodification of imagery, tastes and ideas prevalent in our society. As the saying goes, today's transgression is tomorrow's t-shirt. Art and artists though, still remain an easy target for moral outrage, viewed by many as elitist, decadent and, certainly, not of any social value. Media coverage, as evidenced by the recent fiasco surrounding Bill Henson's photography, fuels this fire, creating a polarized arena of debate by emphasizing extreme opinions rather than the middle ground. In some ways, this skewed public debate can also be said of the pornography industry that, while condemned for stereotyping sexuality and objectifying women, actually

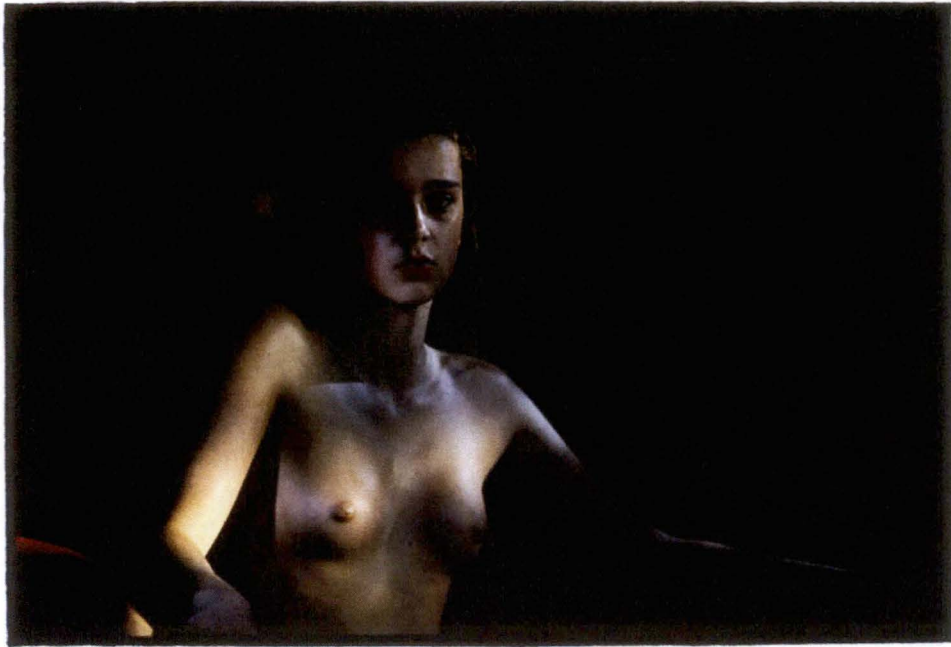
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<sup>41</sup> L.A. Stuckist group February 26<sup>th</sup> 2007 'John Currin The Pornographer' Stuck in L.A.com/blog <http://www.la-stuckism.com/blog> First viewed July 24<sup>th</sup> 2008

<sup>42</sup> Kent, S 'John Currin: The Art of Porn' *Art World* August/September 2008 pp.202-204



offers more aesthetic choices and varieties of sexual portrayal than the fashion and advertising industries.



Bill Henson *Untitled #38* 2005/06 127 x 180 cm Type C Photograph

Artists like Currin and Yuskavage and many others, including the Chapman Brothers, Paul McCarthy, Bill Henson and Marlene Dumas, are fundamental to my practice in that they push the boundaries of visual presentation. Reaction to their work is a good indicator of where culture ‘sits’ regarding challenging ideas and artworks. The controversy surrounding Henson’s photographs of adolescents also indicates there are some taboos in society that are probably never going to be broken down. All the skin and smut we see on a daily basis in the public arena may seem like we are heading towards a society devoid of moral fabric. Yet, the public outcry surrounding Henson indicates that there are moral boundaries that society, as a whole, is not comfortable approaching.

## Flashy Photographers and Sexy Stereotypes

The influence of Fischl, Currin, Yuskavage and other artists dealing in the darker side of culture is balanced, in this submission, by the work of several post-pop designers and photographers, whose works were studied for their formal construction. David La Chapelle and Jasper Goodall are two contemporary artists whose work is sexy, dynamic, colourful and celebratory of contemporary sexuality. To some extent they capture the look of twenty first century western party culture, with their use of decadence, excess and glamour, exemplifying porn chic.



David La Chapelle 1999 *Have You Seen Me?*

80 x 120 cm Photograph



Jasper Goodall 2002 *Butt Girl*

60 x 80 cm Digital Print

Chapelle and Goodall became known to the public via their work in the world of advertising and their works still carry the high- quality seductive look of commercial design. Both artists explore the look of sexuality through highly staged and manipulated imagery. The work is overt yet seemingly unthreatening, perhaps because of all the stylization. In Chapelle's photography there is a richness of colour and light that refers to the ambience of the disco or strip club. It is an aesthetic associated with partying, casual sexual encounters and raunch culture.

Both Chapelle and Goodall explore sexual fantasy in their work. Goodall describes his work as 'dreamy and sexual contemporary art and an exploration into desire'<sup>43</sup>. Chapelle, in a similar vein says his work is about

<sup>43</sup> Stehlik, L. 2005 'Interview with Jasper Goodall' *Icon Magazine* May 2005



‘escapist fantasies, celebration and beauty’<sup>44</sup>. Goodall has been described as helping to define the look of his era with commercial design for Levi’s, Nike, Adidas, BMW and The Face. Chapelle has worked for Playboy, Levi’s, Estee Lauder, Volvo and Diesel clothing. Chapelle has also done numerous photo shoots of celebrities in highly sexually suggestive contexts, most famously, photographing 17-year old Britney Spears in Lolita style for *Rolling Stone* magazine. These sexualized ad campaigns and photo essays are consumed by the viewing public and help to inform what *sexy* looks like in the twenty-first century.



Magazine covers *The Face* by Jasper Goodall, *Rolling Stone* by David LaChapelle

<sup>44</sup> Raushenbush, P 2000 'David LaChapelle: Superstars and the Divine'  
<http://www.beliefnet.comEntertainment/2000/05David-LaChapelle-Superstars-And-The-Divine.aspx> First viewed 6th August 2008

## Related Theoretical Investigations

Paralleling the proliferation of sexual imagery in contemporary culture is the increase in the literature devoted to the phenomenon. Three books, in particular have proved to be particularly illuminating and essential to the research: *The Porn Report* (2008) by Catherine Lumby, Alan Mckee and Katherine Albury<sup>45</sup>, *Female Chauvinist Pigs; Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (2005) by Ariel Levy<sup>46</sup> and *Pornification; Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture* (2007) edited by Susanna Paasonen, Kaarina Nikumen and Laura Saarenmaa.<sup>47</sup>

Catherine Lumby's 1997 publication *Bad Girls; Sex, Feminism and the Media in the 90's*<sup>48</sup> also provided an important source of background information at the start of my Masters candidature. Lumby, an Australian academic, was the first author I read who comments on the changing nature of our relationship with the mediated sexual image. She suggests that Generation Y, who were the first generation to be brought up in the digital world, have developed a sophisticated and fluid relationship with the imagery that surrounds them. While the emphasis in her book is on women, it implies a general cultural shift towards an embrace of sexual imagery, particularly imagery that had been labeled sexist by feminist critics of the 1970s and 1980s. Lumby plots the course of a developing pro-active stance towards sex, by young women, that is increasingly overt, media-savvy and self-directed. Her writing was particularly influential in the early stages of the candidature when I was constructing the first body of work; *My Pussy Loves Rich Boys*. The young women and men in these paintings look like the type of people Lumby is referring to. They are brash, defiant and in charge of their own sexual persona. Their engagement with the world of sex is informed by the

<sup>45</sup> Lumby, C, Mckee, A & Albury, K 2008 *The Porn Report* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne

<sup>46</sup> Levy, A 2005 *Female Chauvinist Pigs; Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, Free Press, New York

<sup>47</sup> Paasonen, S, Nikumen, K & Saarenmaa, L (eds) 2007 *Pornification; Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture* Oxford/Berg Publishers New York

<sup>48</sup> Lumby, C 1997 *Bad Girls, Sex, Feminism and the Media in the 90's*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney

images and words of the mass media, including pornography, which they consume, subvert and use for their own means. It is this engagement and manipulation of media (which in the last ten years has further developed into the production of homemade media via the Internet) that is the focus of Lumby's investigations. The cover statement from *Lumby's book* provides a succinct overview of her investigation.

Catherine Lumby gives us a controversial and exciting new take on debates surrounding pornography, censorship and the media, arguing that the complaints of sexism which are often leveled at popular culture and the media are simplistic and out of date. Feminist attitudes to censorship and the mass media have become a crucible for this debate. Many young women disagree with the campaigns against sexist ads and images in the media and openly consume pornography themselves. They reject the victim tag for women and have a more complex view of the way power operates in contemporary society. Feminist censorship is puritanical and outmoded, not recognizing the ease with which today's young women engage with the media or indeed the aplomb with which these women practice feminism and manage their sexuality.<sup>49</sup>

Since the publication in 1997 of Lumby's book the pornification of culture has continued at an outstanding rate. Trends and behaviour that Lumby identified as markers of change concerning sexual culture have become entrenched modes of public activity and have been labeled raunch culture by the mass media.

Levy's 2005 book<sup>50</sup> is an insightful and highly critical look at how the sexualization of culture is in fact plagued with the same double standards that have always existed between the sexes. Levy's investigation is pertinent to

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Levy, A *op.cit.*

my work for its acknowledgement and description of the phenomena rather than its general negative stance towards raunch culture.

I'd walk down the street and see teens and young women  
 - and the occasional wild fifty year old - wearing jeans cut so  
 low they expose what came to be known as butt cleavage  
 paired with miniature tops that showed off breast implants  
 and pierced navels alike. Sometimes, in case the overall  
 message was too subtle, the shirts would be emblazoned  
 with the Playboy bunny or say Porn Star across the chest.<sup>51</sup>

Levy's moral outrage at raunch culture provided a valuable counterpoint to the early observations of Lumby and forced me to consider the deeper implications of society's embrace of overt sexuality, which to a large extent I found visually and intellectually attractive. Her insights do however appear somewhat dismissive of what Lumby has described as a *fluid and sophisticated relationship with the media*<sup>52</sup>. The idea of people, in particular women, being victims of culture is quite obvious in her writing, implying that young women lack self-awareness and the ability to discriminate between sexy and sexist. There is an element of condescension about the writing as if to say how can no one else see things the way I do.

I was presented with a sticker of a woman's hip to knee  
 region clad in garters and fishnets above the words,  
 "ASK ME: If I know where my G-spot is." (I am strangely  
 shy about discussing the topography of my vagina with  
 strangers, so I declined to wear the sticker as instructed  
 by the woman in pigtails at the door.)<sup>53</sup>

Levy's analysis of raunch culture as a form of superfluous sexual conformity, with the real ability to undermine all that women have gained in

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 2-3

<sup>52</sup> Lumby, *C op.cit.*

<sup>53</sup> Levy, *A op.cit.*, pp 72

the last thirty years was influential in how I designed my paintings. The young people that are the subjects of *My Pussy Loves Rich Boys* become cartoon like stereotypes of their supposed self-directed sexual defiance. They are visual clichés of their own alleged empowerment, conforming to a culture that is dumbed down and sexed up.

The real value, for me, in Levy's writing is the detailed listing of cultural shifts that mark the arrival of cultural pornification. Among them are the rise of the porn star as a mainstream source of cultural interest, the explosion of women (famous and otherwise) posing nude in magazines, the mainstreaming of pole dancing (from erotic act to fitness craze), accelerated numbers of women seeking cosmetic surgery (in particular breast and vagina augmentation), and proliferation of sexually explicit imagery in the public arena, including film, advertising and on the internet.<sup>54</sup>

These examples of pornification are examined in much greater detail, and I would say more objectively, in the book *Pornification: Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture*<sup>55</sup>.

*Pornification* presents an international overview of how Pornography - from softcore to hardcore, gay to straight, female to male, black to white - infiltrates and proliferates through our media. Porn is everywhere from the suggestiveness of music videos to the explicit discussions of popular magazines; from the erotica of advertising to the refashioning of sex acts into art works; from a small garage industry to an internet empire. The media immerses us in the pornographic aesthetic. Now integral to popular culture, porn is part of our daily lives. Sexual desire is commodified and the media leads the way. Exploring music videos, Cosmogirls and Gaydar online forums, H&M's street advertising, retro pin-ups, film and educational sex videos alike, *Pornification* analyses the transformation of porn in

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 18-25

<sup>55</sup> Paasonen, S, Nikumen, K & Saarenmaa, L (eds) *op.cit.*

today's media and its impact on our culture.<sup>56</sup>

If Levy and Lumby provided a general basis for the conceptual development of my first body of work then the editors and authors of *Pornification; Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture* have helped to articulate the subject matter for the second body of paintings in a highly precise manner. My exploration of the mainstreaming of porn was originally conceived from my own personal observations of real life and analysis of the mass media. The exploration of pornification in this publication reinforced my own findings, offering an international evaluation of cultural trends I had witnessed first hand. My second series of paintings, *There Goes The Neighbourhood*, uses five examples of sexual culture that I have identified as reflective of Pornification. These are the rise of the porn star as legitimate entertainer, the explicitness of sexual activity in music video, the complete removal of body hair by young women, the acceptance of anal sex as mandatory in sexual engagement and transformation of pole dancing from erotic entertainment to fitness routine. All of these examples (of which there are many more) I have experienced first hand and all of them are discussed in *Pornification; Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture*. The explorations into the various ways porn has infiltrated mainstream culture are critical and broad ranging, starting with various examples and description.

Composed principally from a master shot, which shows all three of the women washing the car in exaggerated poses, and a series of inserts which depict one or other of the women performing acts that are highly evocative of explicit sexual activity with abstracted parts of the car, the rest of the video functions as a pot-pourri of pornographic tropes...

...we are introduced to three new characters; middle-aged

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*



firemen who are seen admiring the women as they wash the car, discussing them with each other and, ultimately, spraying them with water from a hose held between their legs at crotch level.<sup>57</sup>

This is followed by critical analysis involving political, ethical, cultural and psychological considerations. In terms of the quote above from Watson and Railton's essay *Sexed Authorship and Pornographic Address in Music Video*, the subject matter is explored in relationship to authorized female sexuality, the commerce driven commodification of the sexually explicit, its use of the body as a fetish object and signifier, the position of irony within the video and the maintaining of patriarchal order as subtext.<sup>58</sup>

Railton and Watson, as do many of the other contributors to the book, also offer speculation about the possible future directions that pornification may travel, suggesting a merging of hardcore pornography and music video could become standard in contemporary culture.

Perhaps the logical destination of this process of pornification is the increasing production of X-rated music videos, that is to say, explicit versions of what are already highly sexualized videos, designed for late night transmission. For instance, while the censored version of N.E.R.D.'s *Lapdance* (2001) features women performing for the pleasure of their male customers, wearing just enough clothing to clean it up, in the uncensored version most of these clothes are removed, with breasts and buttocks not only flaunted and displayed, but also touched, squeezed and licked.<sup>59</sup>

This method of description, analysis and speculation is repeated throughout the publication which covers such subjects as using porn as the basis for art

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<sup>57</sup> Railton, D & Watson, P 2007 'Sexed Authorship And Pornographic Address in Music Video' in Paasonen, S, Nikunen, K & Saarenmaa, L (eds) 2007 *Pornification; Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture* Oxford/Berg Publishers New York pp.119-120

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.116-125

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 124

making, the history of pornographic film, sexually explicit advertising in the public sphere and the rise of do it yourself or amateur pornography.

The fourth important publication in my research was the recently released Australian investigation into the use of Pornography, *The Porn Report*. It was compiled by Catherine Lumby, Alan Mckee and Katherine Albury, three of this country's leading academics in the fields of sociology, media and gender studies. The book is the result of a three year, federally funded survey and is the first to be carried out in Australia. All three of the authors acknowledge a liberal attitude towards pornography.

*The Porn Report* is the first piece of serious research carried out to provide basic information to anybody who wants to know the facts about pornography in Australia... We did the study because we believe that the issues raised by pornography are important and that the public debate and policy in the field needs to be based on information, not just moral and ideological positions. We recognize that pornography is a subject on which people will always hold strong moral or political or religious views. We respect their right to do so. We come to this study with our own personal views and values. ...Our central aim is to provide factual information about pornography and its consumption because we believe that informed debate is the foundation of healthy discourse and policy.<sup>60</sup>

*The Porn Report* is a tabulation of statistical information about who consumes pornography, how it is consumed, what kinds of porn are consumed and how this compares to entrenched ideas already prevalent in the community. It also looks at pornography in relationship to feminism, religion and politics. There are special chapters on children and pornography, standards of employment within the sex industry, the rise of do it yourself

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<sup>60</sup> Albury, K, Lumby, C & Mckee, A *op.cit.*

pornography in Australia and, as with *Pornification; Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture* a concluding chapter that speculates about the future of pornography.

The authors' exploration of amateur pornography in Australia backed up my own investigations, and resembled the findings of Esch and Mayer in *How Unprofessional: The Profitable Partnership of Amateur Porn and Celebrity Culture*.<sup>61</sup> Both were highly descriptive of the aesthetics of homemade porn and offered analysis of the reasons people seek to display sexual imagery of themselves to the broader community.

This photo is clearly taken in the couple's lounge room - a chair, flower arrangement, a telephone table with heart shaped cutouts, and an entertainment unit are visible in the background. It is not a 'good' picture; the edge of her head is slightly out of frame on the left, while on the right something that appears to be an open door with a towel draped over it juts in. Not only is the photo very clearly the work of a home photographer, but the wall above them is covered in framed family photos.... Like many amateurs they are able to play at being porn stars by photographing themselves having sex.<sup>62</sup>

The biggest impact that *The Porn Report* had upon this project was its summary that pornography really is a form of entertainment that is produced and consumed by people from all demographics and socio-economic backgrounds. The authors interviewed over 1000 Australian porn consumers from all states and territories and of all sexual persuasions. Most common amongst the participants responses were that they used porn simply for sexual arousal, in most cases this was not a secret activity and in many cases pornography was viewed within the context of a monogamous sexual relationship. The homemade production of pornography was done for a

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<sup>61</sup> Esch, K & Mayer, V *How Unprofessional: The Profitable Partnership of Amateur Porn and Celebrity Culture* in Paasonen, S, Nikunen, K & Saarenmaa, L (eds) 2007 *Pornification; Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture* Oxford/Berg Publishers New York

<sup>62</sup> Albury, K, Lumby, C & McKee, A *op.cit.*, pp.129

variety of reasons including the enjoyment of fantasy, self-expression, experimentation and socialization within marginalized cultural groups.<sup>63</sup>

### Context Summation

The subject of sex and the sexual image has been explored by a huge number of artists and writers throughout history. The artists I have chosen to critically examine have all added significantly to my art practice whether formally or conceptually. The process of investigating both art and the literature pertaining to this project has helped me to understand where the body of work fits within the context of contemporary art. The paintings are a product of my artistic exploration, social observations, and also personal aesthetic attractions. I see much in common with English painter Marcus Harvey, who was the first artist I discussed in length at the beginning of this chapter. His use and celebration of amateur sexual photography has many similarities with the subjects I paint and the formal methods I exploit. There is a kind of grass roots feel to his work, something different from the artificial and glamorized world of pornography that has become a fixture of mainstream culture. The work of all the artists I have reviewed were instructive in some form during the project, helping me to hone in on particular aspects of my own practice or research objectives. For example, the paintings of Eric Fischl were instrumental in my exploration of the suburban landscape even though our actual work has very little in common from a visual point of view.

The researched literature helped to clarify, challenge and expand on my personal beliefs and observations. It provided an international reference point for the pornification I had observed locally, and forced me to critically re-evaluate the influence that pornography can have on body image, gender relations and sexual identity.

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

## HOW THE PROJECT WAS DEVELOPED

### Background and Established Working Methods

The commencement of my Masters research followed four years of undergraduate study, with a major in painting. During this time several formal strategies were developed and employed on a regular basis. Starting with figurative source material (either found on the Internet or from my own photo shoots), I would use Photoshop software to breakdown the image into areas of colour and line. The image would then be projected onto an aluminium sheet and rendered with hi-gloss enamel paints. The majority of my Honours work was constructed in this manner, with occasional use of text on the painting surface to either reinforce or subvert the pictorial information.



Mat Ward *Raunch Culture* series 2006 4 panels 220cm x 480cm

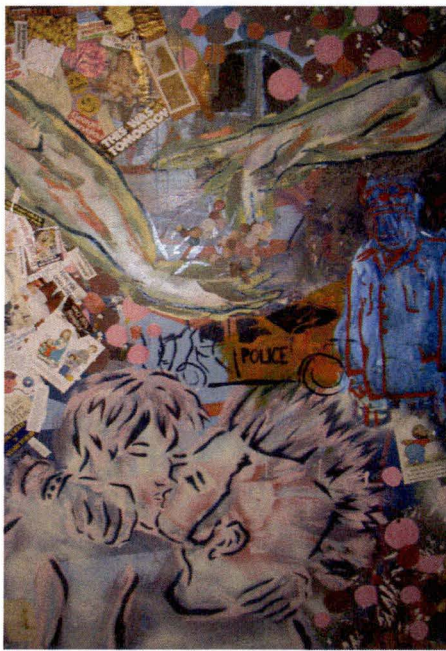
Enamel on Aluminium

My studies explored contemporary western sexuality highlighting the provocative appearance and extrovertism of 21st century sexual culture. The use of hi-gloss paint and aluminium was important to my paintings as it created a glossy and artificial aesthetic reflecting the subject matter I was investigating. As my research shifted from a celebratory reflection of modern sexuality to a more critical appraisal of sexual imagery and pornography new methods of constructing and rendering imagery were required.

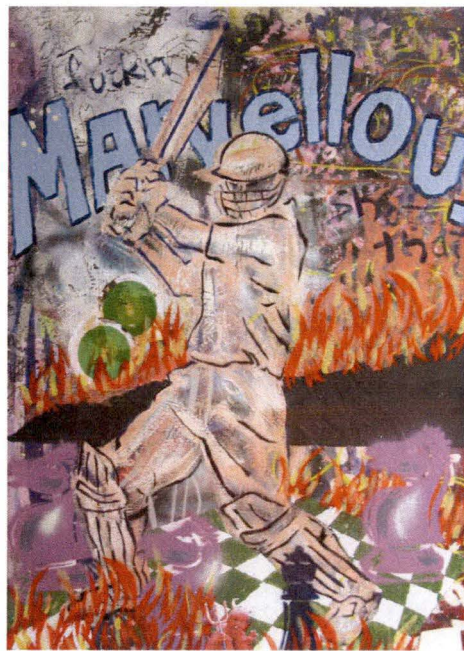


## How The Project Was Developed

The process of experimentation commenced immediately after my Honours submission with a series of works that employed stenciling, collage, different brushing techniques and alternate paint selections including aerosol and oil paints. The series, titled *I Still Don't Remember What I Did Last Summer*, which was completed before the start of my Masters Candidature, was the starting point for a variety of new techniques that feature heavily in this project. It was also invaluable in provoking the specific questions and focused formal experimentation that formed the first phase of my studio research.



*Boys of Summer* 2006 180 x 120cm  
Mixed Media on Aluminium



*Marvellous Shot That* 2007 180 x 120cm  
Mixed Media on Aluminium

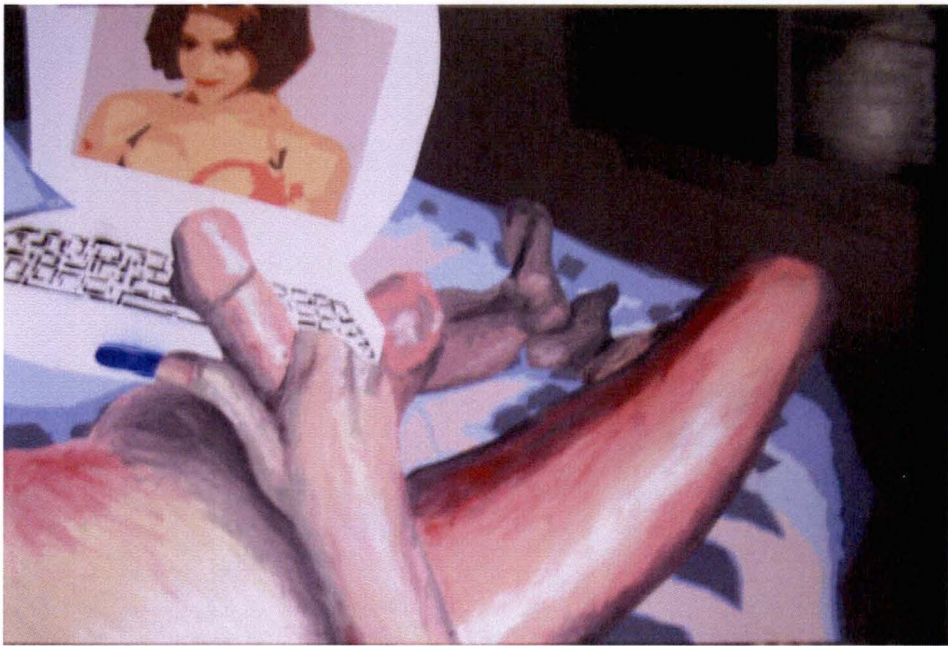
Mat Ward

### Early Experimentation and Aims

Between January and May 2007 I experimented broadly, exploring different paints, surfaces and methods of mark making. Alternative methods of constructing the images were also trialed on computer, with a focus on collage and building up the picture over time as opposed to completing a finished design prior to the start of the actual painting. The initial goal was to break my reliance on hi-gloss paints and explore new methods of



representing the figure. This included different methods of painting the figure and a reconsideration of the relationship between viewer and painted subject. Much of my previous work had presented the subject as 'object', creating a distance between the painting and its audience. I experimented with re-positioning the figure in an attempt to draw the audience into the picture plane. Almost all of the paintings created during the first five months of 2007 were discarded but importantly they did break up my established working patterns and suggested new possibilities for representing the subject matter.



Mat Ward *Wank* 2007 120 x 180 cm

Oil, Hi-Gloss Enamel, Matte Enamel and Vinyl on Aluminium

The two paintings *Wank* and *If I Ever....* are examples of this early experimentation. The figure is orientated in such a way that the audience sees the image from the point of view of the subject. The two paintings also illustrate my use of oil paints. Being new to this medium my efforts were clunky and generally unsatisfying but they did provide an avenue for exploring shading (generally absent from my work) and depth within the pictorial surface.



Mat Ward *If I Ever....* 2007 240 x 120 cm  
Oil, Hi-Gloss Enamel, Matte Enamel and Vinyl on Aluminium

Contrasting hi-gloss and matte paints were used to further enhance depth. I used shiny vinyl contact to render the mobile phone in *If I Ever....* and the computer in *Wank* as a contrast to the rendered painted sections.

The other major focus of early experimentation was image construction. The paintings in the series *I Still Don't Remember What I Did Last Summer* were built up using a collage style technique that sharply contrasted with my Honours work. The painting and initial computer sketch of *Things I Have Learnt From Pornography* show how I used this new method of image design in the first stages of my research.



Mat Ward *Things I Have Learnt From Pornography* 2007

Computer sketch and Painting

120 x 240cm Oil, Aerosol, Acrylic and Hi-Gloss Enamel on Aluminium

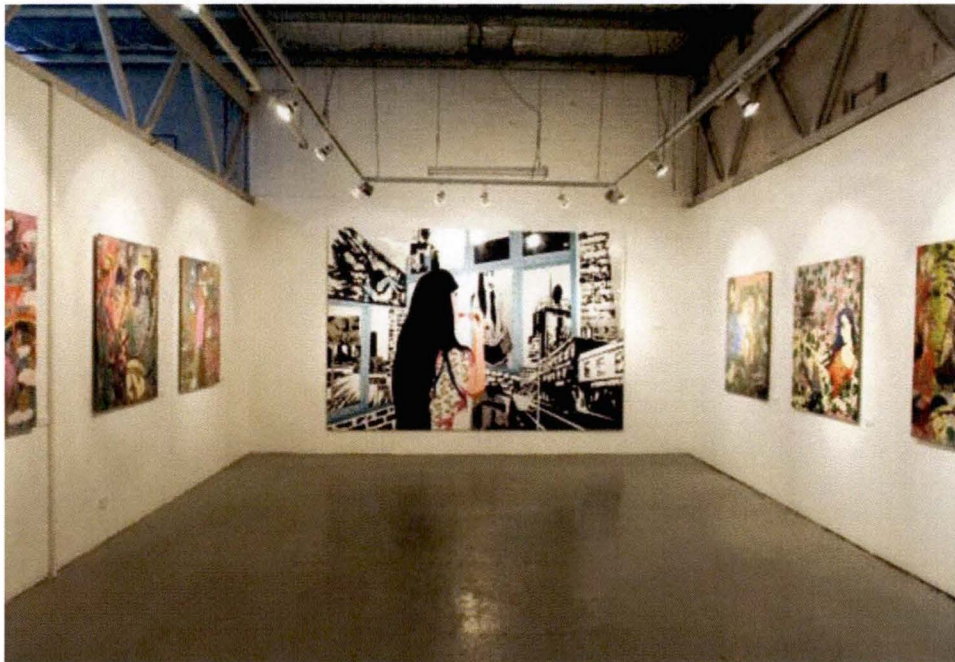
A combination of photography, drawing, computer manipulation, abstraction, text and pattern were used. The computer sketch functioned as a guide to how a painting might look. The finished work relied on an intuitive approach where a section or figure would be rendered followed by time spent reflecting on its success with the next stage of the work being designed from there. The painting is also reliant on stenciling and aerosol paints, techniques that feature heavily throughout this submission.

None of these works led directly to a complete series of paintings and were in, general, unsuccessful as finished pieces. My experimenting over a five-month period was ambitious and broad. The first actual body of work that became part of my submission, *My Pussy Loves Rich Boys*, also started as a set of more refined experiments, focusing particularly on the figure. It became, over time, a refinement of the various formal ideas I had explored incorporating pattern, stenciling, alternative paint types and collage.



**Series One**    *My Pussy Loves Rich Boys*

*My Pussy Loves Rich Boys* is a series of eight paintings that explore Generation Y and their embrace of porn chic. It developed from focused studio experimentation dealing with new ways of rendering the figure and a desire to explore the most visually obvious way that pornography influences culture: through fashion and public behaviour.



Mat Ward

Installation Shot *My Pussy Loves Rich Boys* Inflight Gallery 2007

The series were the result of several threads of inquiry. The starting point was my personal observations of styles of dress, language and attitude that seemed to reflect the notion of porn chic. I expanded my observations through interviews with both members of Generation Y and older people, asking what they made of all the risqué dress and general sexualization of culture around them. These interviews were conducted in person and via the Internet involving colleagues and strangers. To consolidate the interviews and observations I researched current literature on the subject.

Through investigating Generation Y's relationship to sexual imagery I found myself extremely conflicted. At times it was easy to see how these overt expressions of sexuality were actually playful, witty and original. At other times I couldn't help but question whether the visual language of our culture was forcing everyone to substitute personal expression for one-dimensional stereotypes of sexuality. The series was exhibited at *Inflight* artist run initiative in December 2007. The artist statement from the show sums up these dilemmas.

What does it mean to have the phrase *spike my drink* printed across the skimpiest of T-shirts and parade around in the public arena, in complete defiance and possibly ignorance of the insidious and degrading implications associated with the text? A serious dive into transgression or possibly a submission to our culture's desire to keep everything sexed-up and dumb-downed? The protagonists in Mat Ward's latest series of paintings would probably answer with "Nothing at all, although maybe some old people might not see the irony it." (Phillip aged 22, Hobart)

These works explore the attitudes and strategies adopted by a generation (bombarded with sexual information and imagery since birth) to express, challenge and play with their sexual identity. Their sartorial language and mannerisms, exploited to attract attention, manufacture desire and sell lifestyle mimic the devices employed by contemporary mass-media. Brash, extroverted and abject in nature their attire presents a self-directed mask to society. A visual stance divorced of moral codes. Behind these shields lie the very normal insecurities, hypocrisies and desires of emerging sexuality.

Talking to the subjects it becomes clearly apparent that this is just fantasy; a license to be someone else.

“ Its like hip-hop, all front and outrageousness. Just coz my T-shirt says *No Panties* doesn’t mean I will put up with shit. In fact no one gives me grief. They know where it’s at.”  
(Justine aged 19, Sydney)

Every generation draws a line between themselves and their parents. More often than not the same methods are utilized; shock, rebellion, ambivalence and rejection. So where is it at in 2007? Maybe where it’s always been, just that in order to rebel and express yourself in our porn-saturated and instant gratification seeking culture, extreme evocations of self are required.<sup>64</sup>

Key to the visual articulation of this subject matter was a re-thinking of how I painted the figure. I felt it was important to move away from the abstracted figuration that had dominated my practice, desiring a method of rendering the subject that utilized the directness of the human form to speak about sexuality. For the moment I wanted to retain the ‘subject as object’ approach that I had challenged in recent oil paintings, having each figure in the paintings staring back defiantly at the audience.

The new figurative design was based on a combination of Photoshop filtering and hand drawn sketches, merged together on the computer. The main tool I used was the Threshold filter, which breaks the image down into two tones and allows the user to control the ratio between dark and light. The extreme contrasting produced by the Threshold filter resulted in some parts of the figure being quite striking and others lost in extreme dark or light. To counteract this I would combine several differently contrasted versions of the same image. When some parts of the image remained too dark or light I would scan in hand drawn images and merge these as well. The final image would then be coloured in and text added to the clothing.

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<sup>64</sup> Ward, M. 2007 Artist Statement *My Pussy Loves Rich Boys* Inflight Gallery, Hobart





Example of figurative image construction from source photo to final image

The English artist Jasper Goodall's style of figuration was an initial reference point. His art is associated with porn chic and been used as a highly successful marketing tool for lifestyle products directed towards Generation Y. His simplified two-tone figures are a strong example of the stylized figurative imagery I was seeking to create. Solid blocks of colour framed by a combination of soft and jagged lines form each figure. Overtly sexual in stance and apparel, their attitude is reinforced by an affronting gaze. Fantasy outshines reality in his work where the figures sole desire is to be sexy and embrace decadence. There is little, if any, trace of the consequences of their actions. Through Goodall's emphasis on style over substance his subjects lose their individuality, this was important to as I wanted the paintings to reflect the loss of individuality that occurs with conformity to the popularity of porn chic. My stenciled figures are designed to simplify and sexualize the subject, replacing the person with a personality.

## How The Project Was Developed

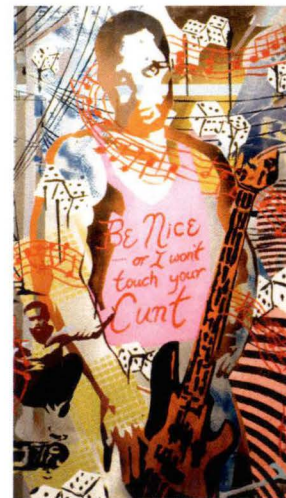


Jasper Goodall *The Observer* 2004 90 x 60 cm and *Petrol* 2003 90 x 60 cm

Digital Print



Digital Print



Figures from Series One *My Pussy Loves Rich Boys* 2007

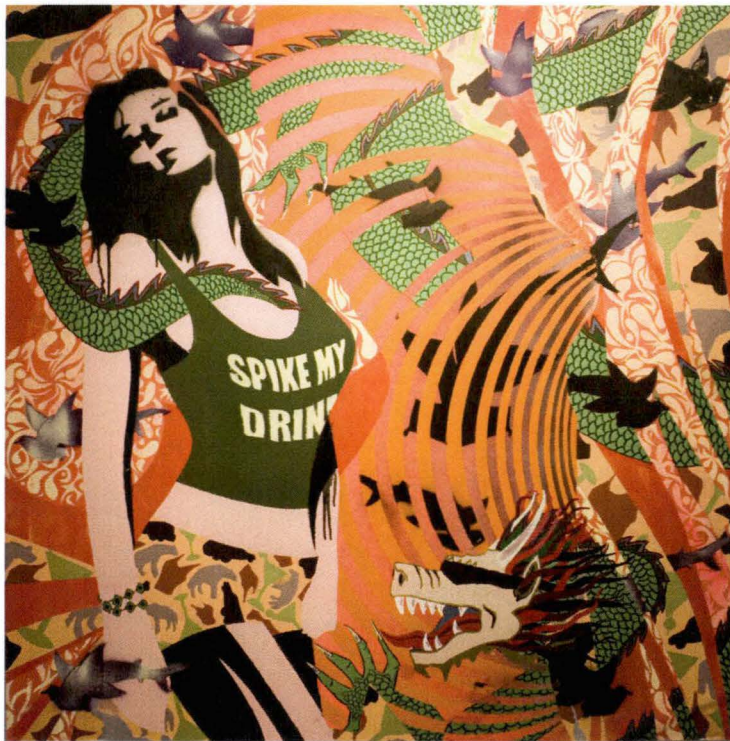
This new method of constructing the figure appealed to me for several reasons. The reduced palette and simplified facial and shadow features were crisp and striking, with individual personality being swapped for stylized generic posturing. This design method became the standard throughout the series, and remained the one element of each painting that was constructed almost exclusively on the computer.

Once the basic method of figuration had been decided on, there were still several new formal devices to I wanted to explore. These were pattern,



repetition, the use of motifs and variety of surface quality - selected to represent the hectic, hedonistic social spaces of Generation Y.

Experiments with pattern gave the painting a sense of movement and created a dense swirling atmosphere that reflected the cultural arena that my subjects inhabit, such as the city and its nightlife. Pattern also took the form of creating camouflage clothing, built from animal and cultural motifs. The idea was to reference the sexual attitudes and lifestyle choices through symbolic use of objects.



Mat Ward *Spike My Drink* 2007      120 x 120 cm  
Mixed Media on Aluminium

The camouflage, in the long run, proved to be an ineffective stylistic device and was dropped. *Spike My Drink*, the first painting in the series, illustrates the use of pattern and camouflage. It also shows the initial method of rendering the text. As the series progressed the text, which is essential to the conceptual reading of the works, developed beyond the simple front-on rendering present in this painting. Overall *Spike My Drink* offered some progressive alternatives from established methods of painting, replacing sparseness with activity and abstraction with figurative detail.



Mat Ward

*No Panties* 2007 120 x 120 cm

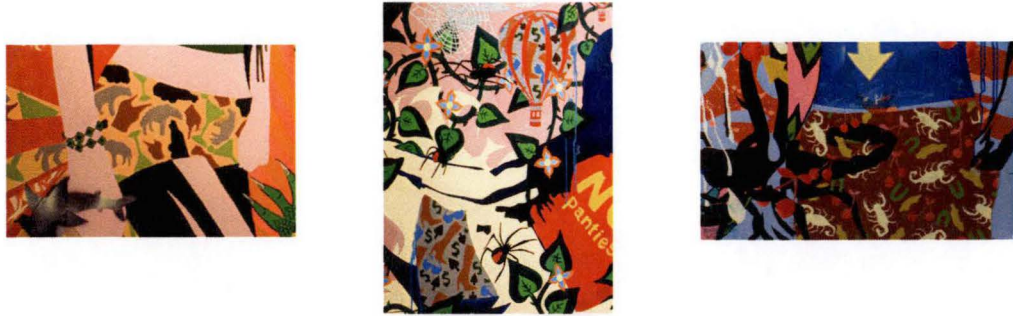
*Taste Ya Momma* 2007 120 x 120 cm

Both Works Mixed Media on Aluminium

Experimentation with formal devices continued throughout the next two paintings: *No Panties* and *Taste Ya Momma*. In particular these two paintings were used to study the relationship between the figures and the backgrounds. The figure in *No Panties* sits on a solid wall of colour with areas of tonal variation neatly divided into soft curving shapes; the work is pristine and shiny. The background in *Taste Ya Momma* is patchy and overworked. Several different kinds of paint were used and were applied to the surface with brushes, rollers, aerosol, cloth and by hand. In both works I intentionally kept the backgrounds light in colour, contrasting with the figure rendered in darker tones.

The camouflage, used as a pattern making device and a method of referencing sexuality through symbolic use of objects, had been problematic in *Spike My Drink*, looking blocky and amateurish. In the next two paintings I further explored its possibilities, and ultimately abandoned it in favour new pattern making/symbolic devices.





Examples of camouflage from first three paintings

These new devices resulted from a desire to build up the surface by introducing even more motifs. Through feedback and self- assessment I decided I could repeat the motifs from the camouflage across the whole picture. I took the scorpions and cherries from *Taste Ya Momma* and stenciled them at various scales amongst the other elements of the painting. The scorpions at a larger scale were more striking, and suggested aggression and competition. By repeating them they created a new form of pattern. This became an effective strategy for creating a vibrant and dense picture without weakening the visual articulation of conceptual concerns through disparate symbolism and surface confusion.

The repetition of animal motifs, such as the now larger scorpions, rendered using stencils and spray paint replaced the somewhat awkward oil painted animals (i.e. dragon in *Spike My Drink* and snake in *Taste Ya Momma*) in the rest of the series.

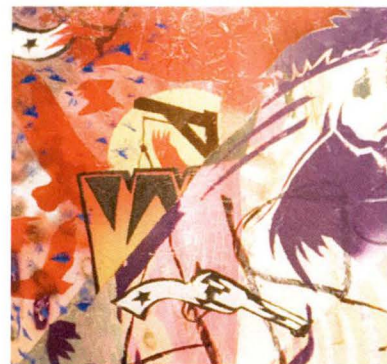
There was a small break in between the completion of the first three paintings of the series and the start of the final five involving a hectic run of exhibitions. During this time I wrote a substantial paper that looked at my Masters progress and in particular the recent paintings and sought critical feedback from staff and fellow students.





Mat Ward *Arse Whore* 2007 120 x 120cm  
Mixed Media on Aluminium

The next three paintings incorporated large sections of bare metal that contrasts with the areas of built up paint. Experiments with text were first trialed in *Arse Whore*. My original concept for the paintings involved the figures wearing T-shirts displaying sexually confronting slogans. The text in the earlier works was bold but static and sloppy.



Example of new text placements

The first experiment was to shift the text from the T-shirt to the back of the subject's shorts. This simple move suggested possibilities that were expanded

upon during the next four paintings. This included using tattoos and necklaces for the construction of text.

The motifs used in *Arse Whore*; the hangman's noose, vultures, cacti, guns and the horse are rendered in a variety of styles from very loose oil painting through to tightly controlled stencils. Their scale and perspective alter at various points across the surface creating pattern and the allusion of depth.



Mat Ward

*Fuck Me Hard* 2007

*Be Nice Or I Won't Touch Your Cunt* 2007

Both Works 120 x 120cm Mixed Media on Aluminium

The next two works are similar to *Arse Whore* in their employment of exposed metal to contrast the thick enamel paint.

The rendering of the text in *Fuck Me Hard* is a good example of further experiments I did with re-positioning. The text is displayed as components of a bling style necklace, a popular form of porn chic jewellery. Parts of the text are repeated across the painting forming pattern and emphasizing the words of the phrase. By removing the text from the clothing the figure could now be rendered in ways other than front on. A cropped portrait of the figure in *Fuck Me Hard* is featured in the left hand section of the work, retaining the gaze of the original. This portrait functioned as a place for the text necklace to sit and created depth via difference in scale between the face and the original figure. Both paintings are extremely busy but retain a cohesion through limited colour selection, effective patterning and the repetition of objects.





Mat Ward *My Pussy Loves Rich Boys* 2007 120 x 120 cm  
Mixed Media on Aluminium

The title piece for this body of work is the result of my desire for an overall pictorial balance across the entire series. Whilst a favoured system of image construction had been arrived at during the previous four months I wanted the paintings to sit cohesively as one body of work. The most striking disparity within the work was the way in which the backgrounds were built up. The earlier paintings like *Spike My Drink* and *No Panties* were constructed on top of solid enamel backgrounds. The patchy background surface featuring bare metal had since become the dominant method of expression. In order to tie the series together I revisited the idea of starting the picture with an opaque background. Consequently this painting is very static and lacks some of the dynamism of paintings like *Arse Whore* and *Fuck Me Hard*.



Mat Ward *I Swallow* 2007 120 x 120cm Mixed Media on Aluminium

The final piece of this series was painted very quickly and I strived not to repeat the mistakes made in *My Pussy Loves Rich Boys*. It was also used to push newly established techniques to the extreme. This is most evident in the loose way elements such as the rainbow were rendered. The enamel paint was brushed on in the roughest of manners, letting it drip and bleed with the other colours. Most of the stenciling (discounting the figure) was also rough. Pattern was created by the use of perforated layers of paint. These were applied very intuitively and quickly, adding to the rushed and messy feel of the painting. The text has again been removed from the figure and clothing, this time being presented in the form of a tattoo.

### **Evaluation of Series One**

This series started life as a large-scale formal experiment. Utilizing a basic conceptual platform, experiments were trialed and critiqued for further refinement and application. Inconclusive or failed formal enquiries also contributed to its success, reducing the options into a tight collection of suitable formal devices. Of particular importance to my practice were the new methods of painting the figure. I set out to move away from abstracted images towards recognizable but painterly figures. The figures in this series



are sharp, detailed and striking. The facial features are reduced but still identifiable. They gaze directly back at the viewer, seemingly confident in the sexuality they project.

Of major significance was the exploration of spray-paint and stenciling. By the completion of this series I had started to build up a rudimentary understanding of the qualities of this medium and formed a range of techniques for its implementation. As a means to test the knowledge I had gained about spray-painting I designed and produced a companion piece for the series called *Cherri, Cherri won't u cum out tonite*. The painting situated a member of Generation Y in an urban environment, surrounded by advertising billboards, roadways and building facades. It was ambitious in scale (240 x 360 cm), highly detailed and required extremely accurate stenciling and application of paint. The success of the finished piece reflects the amount of time spent constructively experimenting over the previous several months, and the decision to up-scale proved influential in the next major body of work.



Mat Ward *Cherri, Cherri won't u cum out tonite* 2007 240 x 360 cm

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium



**Series Two   *There Goes The Neighbourhood***

The second body of work examined pornification as a general phenomena, using domestic spaces to explore pornography's influence on daily life through prominent examples including entertainment, body image and sexual practice. As a means of presenting the subject matter I set the paintings in a typical domestic environment to emphasize how porn is not just a product that is influential on generation Y but something that has had an effect on the wider community. The shift in location from the world of young adults to that of the suburbs required a different, moodier aesthetic.

I photocopied much of Fischl's paintings into black and white to study how he used tone and light to create atmosphere. This proved to be pivotal in my eventual decision to render the new paintings using a black and white palette with large sections of bare aluminium. Key objects from the domestic environment such as lampshades and Venetian blinds, prominent in Fischl's work, also appear in my paintings as light sources.

*There Goes The Neighbourhood* marks a shift in formal strategies in a number of ways. Original image construction followed on from series one with the pictures being collaged together from Internet sourced material including photos and pattern motifs. This method proved to be ineffective; although the compositions looked tight as computer generated A4 sized prints, once they were scaled up to canvas size they lost their cohesion. This was a major learning curve, and showed that scale is an important factor when designing work. The first two paintings, *Pussy is Bullshit* and *Make Love Like A Porn Star* were painted several times, changing various elements in an attempt to bring the pictures to life.



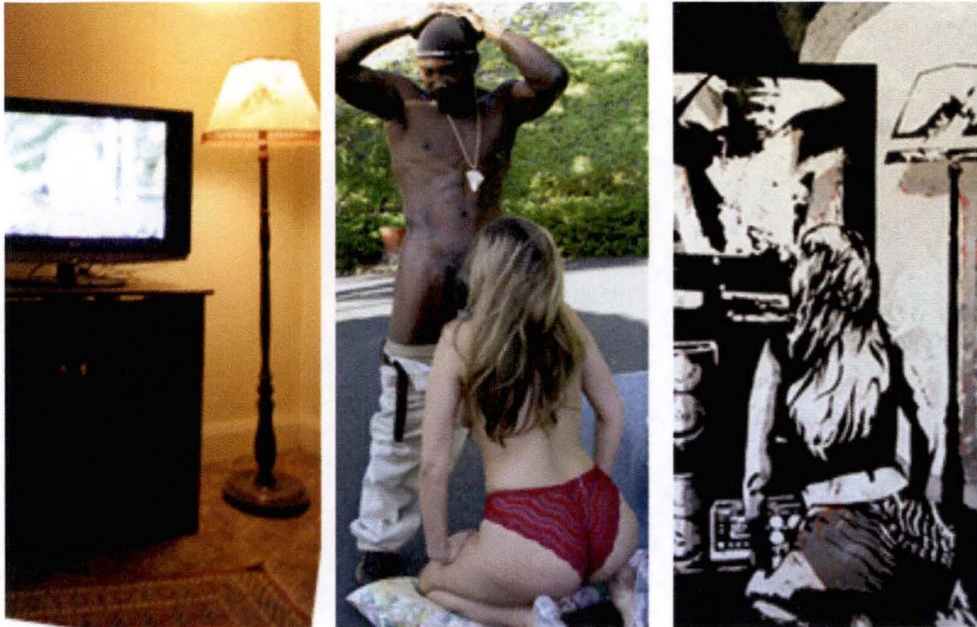
*Pussy Is Bullshit*

*Make Love Like A Porn Star*

Original computer generated sketches

I was determined to use the large-scale (240 x 120cm) format as it swamped the viewer, reinforcing the idea that pornography was an overwhelming part of contemporary culture. A more effective method of image design arose through simplifying the original source material, starting with a single photograph. These photographs were of typical domestic interiors some of which were then carefully combined with Internet sourced material.

The single image format made for a stronger narrative and re-inforced the personal nature of the subject matter; it transferred to the large-scale surface easily, becoming roughly life size, offering the viewer a more personal and plausible scenario than the failed collage designs. The entire series relied on this method of image construction.

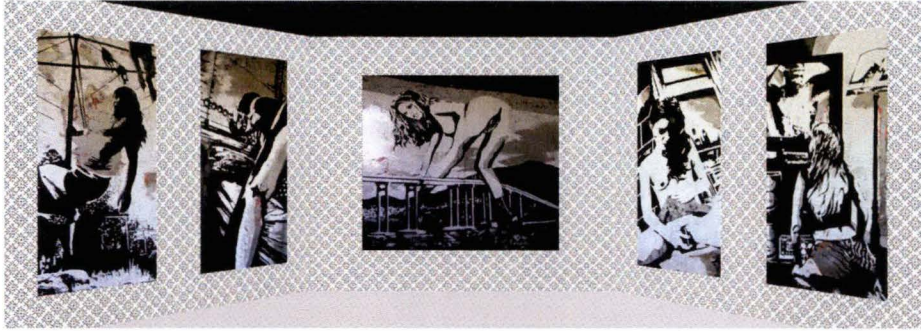


My photography and internet image collaged together to create painting design

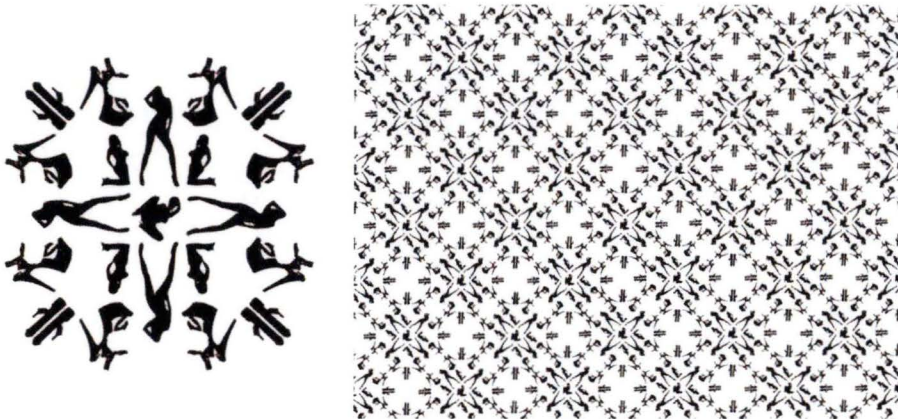
The other major formal device that was expanded upon from series one was the use of the Threshold filter. In this series not just the figure but the entire picture was designed using this process. The contrast between black and white was bridged in places by areas of perforated paint (which acted like shadow). The actual surface of the pictures was also roughed up and painted with varying thicknesses of white enamel paint then rubbed back in places letting the aluminium come through. This approach was used to take the paintings away from the artificial and colourful world that the previous series encapsulated, producing instead a surface that referenced suburban streets rather than the inner city nightclub strip.

To further reinforce the idea of pornography infiltrating suburban life the entire series is installed in a room lined with wallpaper. This wallpaper looks from a distance very much like typical floral household wallpaper. The floral motif is in fact constructed from silhouetted pornographic images; collaged together and reproduced using Photoshop.





Computer generated installation shot featuring paintings against wallpaper



Silhouette motifs and construction of pattern for wallpaper

Two months were spent painting, re-designing and then re-painting my two original computer designed collage images before reverting to a single image photograph as the starting point. This created a realistic arena of activity and focused the viewer's attention on the subject matter. The first painting, *Pole Dancer*, was quickly rendered using spray-paint and stencils with details added with strips of perforated plastic that were laid on the surface and sprayed through. Initially happy with the result, I started conceiving more designs using this method and began an extensive photo shoot using the same suburban house, capturing various rooms and parts of the property. The results of this photo shoot proved rewarding and I went about designing the next paintings in the series following the same process as I employed in the *Pole Dancer* painting. As these designs progressed *Pole Dancer* began to look weak in comparison. The initial success of the black and white design

against scuffed metal lacked depth and movement. Originally unwilling to repaint the image it sat in the studio for about two months as I worked on the new paintings.



Mat Ward Original and reworked version of *Pole Dancer* 2008 240 x 120 cm  
Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium

Once the new paintings started to come together it became more obvious how to fix the first work. I went back to it and removed sections of the body and background, then re-sprayed with stencils. The end result was a less silhouetted image with details in the face and clothing. The figure came to life and the fragmented background added depth to the picture plane.

The next three paintings were developed using a similar method of formal construction. The areas of exposed metal and perforated paint became larger.



## How The Project Was Developed

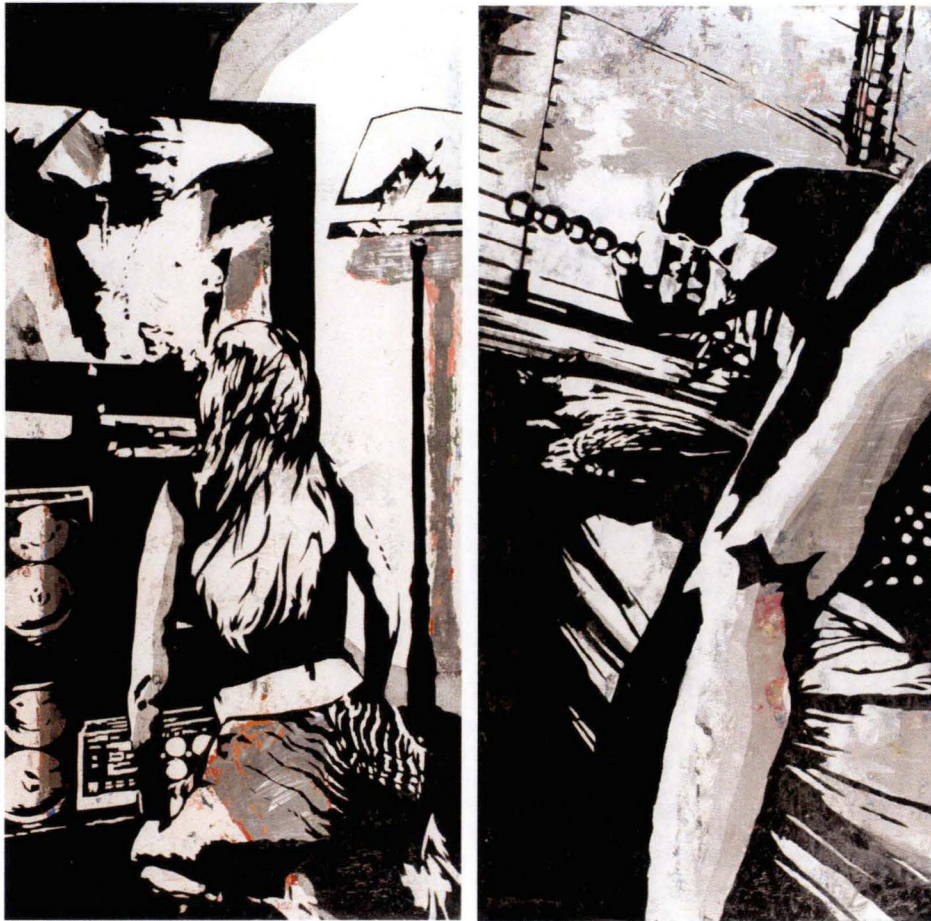
These small changes strengthened the paintings, adding variety to the surface and definition to both the figure and the domestic background.



Mat Ward *The Pursuit of Hairlessness* 2008 240 x 120 cm with detail  
Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium

Variety in the visual relationship between subject and viewer, an idea I had experimented with earlier in my candidature, also became a feature of two of the works, *Anal Fun* and *Be In My Video*. Both these images are less front-on than the previous two paintings, inviting the audience into the same space as the subjects.

*Anal Fun* contains no Internet imagery. It is a single shot from one of my photo shoots of domestic interiors. It contains large areas of bare metal, mainly in the window section of the painting, which echoes the rendering of architecture in the other paintings.



Mat Ward

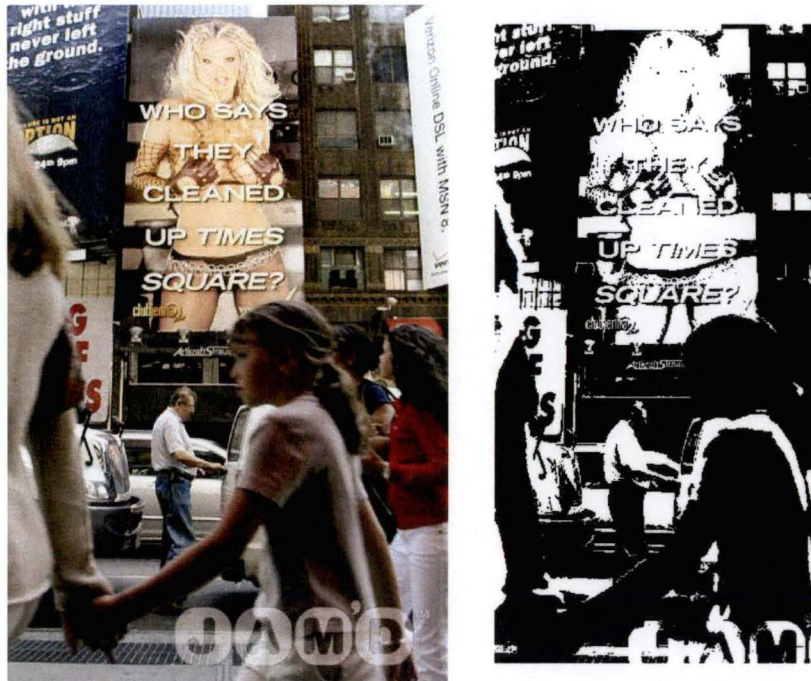
*Be In My Video 2008*

*Anal Fun 2008*

Both Works 240 x 120 cm Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium

The fifth painting in the series is of porn star Jenna Jameson. From the outset of this series I wanted to paint Jenna Jameson as a symbol of pornography's infiltration of mainstream culture. The first collage style design was painted and altered many times. Dissatisfied, I designed several alternatives trying to find a single image that visually articulated the concept of the porn star becoming a fixture of contemporary society.

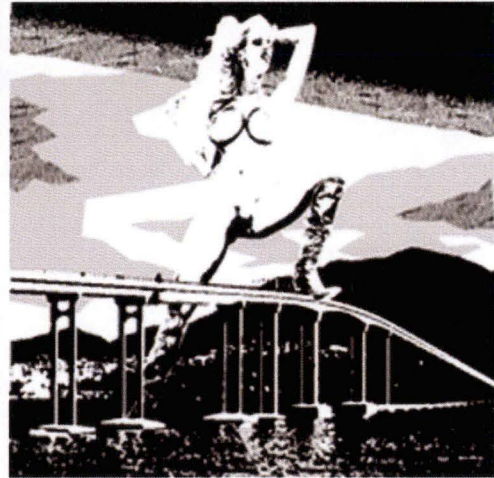
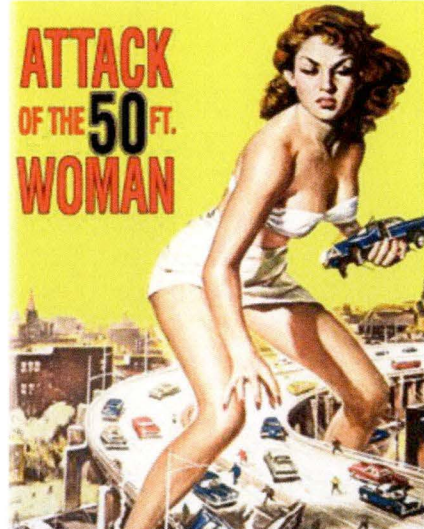
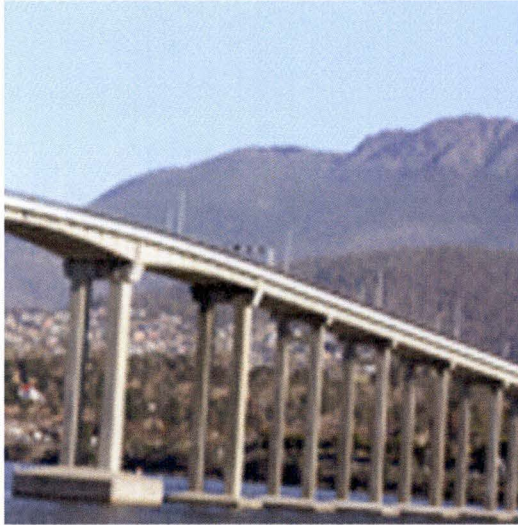




Early source material and design for *There Goes The Neighbourhood*

The major stumbling block was constructing an image that referenced the suburban or domestic. Most source material that featured Jameson was either shot in the studio or the inner city environment. Emphasizing that porn wasn't just a big city phenomenon, but was influential across the whole of western culture was important so I shifted my design approach once again to a combination of my own photography and Internet imagery. Whilst surfing for potential pictures I came across a poster for the classic B-grade movie *Attack Of The 50 FT Women*. The poster depicts a statuesque female standing over a city freeway, picking up cars and raising havoc. I decided to cast Jameson as a modern equivalent of this all powerful and destroying female. To reinforce the idea of the small-town world I decided to design the painting using Hobart as the location. Photography of the Tasman Bridge, Hobart city and Mt. Wellington was captured and combined with various images of Jameson.

## How The Project Was Developed



Local photography, movie poster and early designs for  
*There Goes The Neighbourhood*

The painting is designed as the central piece for the series, with Jenna confidently dominating her surroundings, her influence branching out across society through the adjoining panels. For this reason it is roughly twice as large as the other panels. It features extensive areas of bare aluminium, particularly in the sky, breaking up the picture plane. It also utilizes perforated areas of paint as shadow and highlights on the figure and throughout the architecture. Its final design is a long way from its origin as a multi-layered collaged piece, reflecting the formal strategies developed whilst painting this series.





Mat Ward    *There Goes The Neighbourhood* 2008    220 x 240 cm  
Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium

### Evaluation of Series Two

There were some interesting challenges in both designing and painting the *There Goes The Neighbourhood*. Reverting to photography, with some collage elements, was the turning point. Using a single photo provided the image with an uncluttered focus on the subject and their activity. It also gave the opportunity to continuing experiments with the Threshold filter, resulting in the entire picture using this resource for its construction. Working on a larger than life scale was another important factor in this series. The images dominate the visual plane, much like the contemporary urban landscape itself. The swamping effect is further enhanced with the installation of the paintings in a wallpapered enclosure, surrounding the viewer with images of sexuality and domesticity. The patterns of domesticity and the refinement of computer



design with the Threshold filter became the major formal goals of the third body of work for my candidature.

### Series Three *Amateurland*

The final series of work, *Amateurland*, re-presents homemade sexual imagery, source from the Internet. It highlights the different forms and uses of pornography in our culture with particular emphasis on self-expression and exploration of sexuality. This investigation offered compelling evidence that society's use of pornography is not limited to passive viewing for sexual arousal, but also aids in the construction, celebration and understanding of personal sexuality. The paintings, like Larter's and Harvey's, are not stock standard images of sex as seen in *Penthouse* or *Hustler* magazines, or in commercial advertising. They are personal, warts and all, and self-directed, projected into the public arena in good faith and humour, re-affirming that we are all valid sexual beings. For all the airbrushed, perfect bodies we see in contemporary visual culture amateur pornography is still the most viewed form of the genre, and I felt it was important to reflect this in my project.

The formal development of *Amateurland* is indebted to a body of work I produced for a small solo show at a local café during the time I painted series two. The subject matter for this exhibition was figurative and it utilized many of the techniques I had employed during the making of both series one and two. Upon completing series two and contemplating how to design the next body of work I looked closely at this series, titled *Afterpartyafterpartyafter...*



Examples from *Afterpartyafterpartyafter...* series 2007 both works 60 x 120 cm

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium

*Afterpartyafterpartyafter....* was a further refinement of the Threshold filter construction and aerosol painted stenciling process. Instead of black and white it was black with one background colour per painting, featuring areas of bare metal. The major difference formally between this series and *There Goes The Neighbourhood* was the scale of the paintings.

*Afterpartyafterpartyafter....* featured eight paintings at a 60 cm by 120 cm scale. They resemble enlarged 'happy snaps', which is where the contents of the series originated from.

Early experiments focused on achieving a balance between the figurative stencil elements of the paintings and the coloured backgrounds. I wanted to expand upon the single colour format of *Afterpartyafterpartyafter....*, as the two-tone image resembled *There Goes The Neighbourhood* a little too closely.

The starting process revolved around re-visiting some established techniques developed during my Honours year.



Examples of Honours work constructed using abstraction and simplification of tone

2006

Having broken my reliance on abstraction, it was an intriguing experience to see how (and if) old techniques could be complimented with new formal methods in picture construction. The initial few testers retained too much figurative detail in the background colour layers. Through experimentation the backgrounds gradually became simpler, turning into large areas of solid colour that vaguely retained the shape and perspective of the foreground information. Tonal contrast is achieved in the balance between the foreground (darkest), background colours (mid tone) and the bare metal (lightest).





Design stages of series 3      Original source photo, Threshold filter, abstracted background including bare metal sections and finished design

As the series developed certain pictorial devices, such as patterning in the form of fishnet stockings, carpet and lingerie re-occurred. Their prominence in the paintings created an arena that was both sexy and domestic, emphasizing the homemade nature of the subject matter. These repeated elements helped to unify the body of paintings. The cutting and rendering of the stencil layer is highly refined in this body of work, highlighting the details in each of the photos whether figurative or dealing with the background details. The surface of the paintings is flat and clean with the paint rolled on evenly and the bare metal sections polished. This approach, which is in opposition to the way I constructed the surface in the previous two series was chosen to reference the photographic quality of the original source material.

### **Evaluation of Series Three**

*Amateurland* presented an opportunity to re-visit and combine a large array of formal methodology from the last three or so years of studio practice. The results have been satisfying in that the combination of techniques proved to be a highly effective way of visually articulating the conceptual concerns of this series. Reducing the scale made the paintings easier to work with, resulting in more attention to detail leading to a more striking image. As a

## How The Project Was Developed

series they bombard the viewer with a smorgasbord of sexual imagery, reflecting the nature of the Internet and its endless avenues for consuming pornography.



Mat Ward *Shower Fun, Chubby Wife and Home Bear*

2008 All Works 60 x 120 cm

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium



## OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSION

This project investigated the pornification of western culture, the outcome of which was three series of paintings, each of which focused on specific examples of how pornography has become an established part of mainstream society. The research was conducted with the aim of providing a critical visual representation of the diverse ways that pornography is produced, consumed and commodified by individuals as a normal part of their daily lives. Motivation to pursue these inquiries comes from a personal involvement with pornography as a consumer and a fascination with contemporary culture, which has seen sexually explicit material continue to proliferate at an astonishing rate over the last decade.

The first series, *My Pussy Loves Rich Boys*, examined Generation Y's relationship with porn chic and raunch culture. The subjects in the works have grown up surrounded by highly sexualized imagery. The employment of pornographic tropes is a prominent aspect of their exploration of sexuality, as evidenced through the fashion, posturing and language represented in the paintings. However, the use of confronting and risqué sexuality in personal expression did not correlate with a personal understanding of sexual identity. The overt sexual attitudes and appearances displayed in the paintings reflect a commodification of porn by Generation Y, and parallels previous generations paths to adulthood, where differentiation from adults involves rebellion, shock tactics and an embrace of taboo. There is a conformity to the way the subjects look; all adopt a similar style of dress and outrageousness that, I feel, contradicts the desire for individual expression. The idea of raunch culture being nothing more than a reduction of sexuality to visual stereotypes, as opposed to a step in the direction of equality and sexual empowerment, is one of the key observations in Ariel Levy's book *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*.<sup>65</sup>

The second suite of paintings, *There Goes The Neighbourhood*, explored the pornification of culture beyond the world of adolescence. The subject matter

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<sup>65</sup> Levy, A 2005 *Female Chauvinist Pigs; Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, Free Press, New York.

concentrated on five examples of how pornography has influenced or infiltrated western society. These were: the rise of the porn star as a mainstream celebrity; sexual explicitness in music video; body augmentation; sexual practice that references pornography and; pole dancing as a form of fitness routine. Of primary importance to the selection of subject matter was the publication *Pornification; Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture* edited by Susanna Paasonen, Kaarina Nikumen & Laura Saarenmaa. This book provided detailed information about pornification as well as various histories and speculations about the future of pornography and mainstream culture. The paintings are, I feel, more personal in approach than the former series, through the use of domestic space to create an arena of activity that invites the viewer in. The diversity of subject matter, across the series, is reflective of how porn has informed not just the aesthetics of contemporary life but also influenced the way individuals think about and participate in sexual activity.

The final series, *Amateurland*, focused on the production and consumption of pornography by people outside of the adult entertainment industry. Known as amateur or do-it-yourself porn this genre has become the most viewed form of pornography in western culture. People have always produced sexual imagery of themselves, sometimes for private consumption and at other times for publication. Contemporary technologies such as the digital camera and the Internet have allowed amateur producers revolutionary methods for both capturing and distributing their material. The research revealed amateur porn differs considerably from 'professional' porn in many ways. Rather than simply being a form of entertainment designed to sexually arouse, it is produced as a form of self-expression, sexual experimentation and to connect with other people of similar sexual interests and persuasions. Amateur porn also offers a plethora of alternative aesthetics to conventional pornography, which to a large extent remains phallocentric and is associated with the buxom playboy stereotype.

The project has made a significant contribution to the field through first: a critical pictorial representation of pornification, highlighting the diverse ways that pornography has embedded itself into mainstream culture, and second; through the analysis of contemporary visual and literary investigations of

pornification. As a whole, the project has revealed that pornography is used by a large percentage of western society, for a variety of reasons, and that pornography is influential in how individuals relate to their sexuality. It has also shown how pornography informs culture through fashion, advertising and entertainment and suggests increasingly our psychological and intellectual lives will be confronted with the tropes and mores of pornography.

Porn, it would appear, is very much in vogue at the present time, with people willing to tolerate it rather than appear old-fashioned or uncool. Yet significantly, the proliferation of pornography in culture does not correlate with a substantial shift in the way individuals relate to pornography. The research showed that many people still equate porn with sexual stereotyping, the submission and objectification of women, and unsound morals and ethics. Despite this, it is stated in *The Porn Report*<sup>66</sup> that one in three Australians (roughly 5 million people) use pornography at sometime every year, qualifying it as a mainstream pastime. With this amount of consumption taking place it is perhaps natural that pornography has gone from being simply a method of sexual arousal, to a form of media that informs many aspects of individual's lives.

Building upon the research conducted, further investigation into pornification could examine the contradictions the project revealed between the acceptance of pornography as a part of society and the actual relationship individuals have with it. The proliferation of highly sexualized imagery throughout western culture may not necessarily continue at the rate we are currently witnessing it- there is, already, a backlash against it, as highlighted through the analysis of critics of porn chic and raunch culture, who raise valid arguments concerning how pornification is reducing sexuality to a style and look. A future investigation of pornification could focus on the debates for and against its effects on both individuals and culture and explore the course that pornification takes over the coming decade.

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<sup>66</sup> Albury, K, Lumby, C & Mckee, A 2008 *The Porn Report* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne pp. 49.

## Appendix A

### The Content of Pornography in Australia

The content of porn is extremely focused towards male arousal and ultimately male orgasm. The *Understanding Pornography in Australia* study analyzed the fifty top selling pornographic DVDs (the majority of porn in Australia is viewed via DVD as opposed to the internet or in cinemas) and found massive gender bias in the sexual activity being displayed. For instance there is four times as much oral sex being performed on men than women and male orgasms are shown six times as much as female orgasms.<sup>67</sup> The boundaries of sexual experimentation are also based on a masculine perspective of heterosexuality. Whereas women engage in some kind of sexual activity with other women (whether by themselves or as part of group sex) in roughly one in every ten sex scenes, there were no scenes showing sexual activity (including kissing) between men, even when there was more than one male performer in a scene. This particular portrayal of sexual play was further exemplified with statistics about anal sex. More screen time was devoted to anal penetration of women than any other form of penetration such as doggy style, missionary position or women on top. There was no screen time involving anal penetration of men by women.<sup>68</sup> There were some other statistics where the gender gap was not so biased in favour of men including the amount of time that focused on masturbation (roughly equal), who initiated sex (women here initiated sex twice as often as men) and the amount of speech directed at the audience, which was roughly equal between the sexes.<sup>69</sup>

Body types were also studied in *Understanding Pornography in Australia*. When asking people about porn and the types of bodies they are likely to find the response is usually, when describing the female participants, large breasted, blonde with long legs. Male participants are usually thought of as either hairy and ugly, or muscular and shaved; either variety is thought to

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<sup>67</sup> <sup>67</sup> Albury, K, Lumby, C & Mckee, A 2008 *The Porn Report* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne pp. 65

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.67

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63



have a larger than average penis. The study revealed some truth behind these common assumptions.

We also looked at breast size. Does mainstream pornography reduce women to giant silicone breasts on legs? The researchers noted whether characters had 'small', 'average' or 'large' breasts. In the films analysed, 725 characters showed their breasts. Of these, 19 per cent has small breasts, 39 per cent had average breasts and 42 per cent had large breasts. The researchers also noted whether actresses in the videos had obviously had plastic surgery on their breasts ('boob jobs'). They concluded 29 per cent had obviously had breast surgery and 60 percent had not had breast surgery; in 11 per cent of cases they were unsure.<sup>70</sup>

The truth behind penis size in pornography was revealed to be similar to the public's general perception.

Finally, penis size does matter in porn... Of the 587 male or transgender characters who showed their penises, only 3 percent had small penises, while 42 per cent were average and 55 per cent had penises that were appreciably longer and/or thicker than the average penis.<sup>71</sup>

None of these statistics are necessarily surprising if we understand pornography as being a fantasy product that is in general tailored towards male arousal. The information gathered in the report confirms my own observations from viewing pornography.

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

## Appendix B

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## **Appendix C**

### **List of Submitted Works**

#### **Series One *My Pussy Loves Rich Boys***

1. *Spike My Drink* 2007  
Mixed Media on Aluminium 120cm x120cm
2. *No Panties* 2007  
Mixed Media on Aluminium 120cm x120cm
3. *Taste Ya Momma* 2007  
Mixed Media on Aluminium 120cm x120cm
4. *Arse Whore* 2007  
Mixed Media on Aluminium 120cm x120cm
5. *Fuck Me Hard* 2007  
Mixed Media on Aluminium 120cm x120cm
6. *Be Nice Or I Won't Touch Your Cunt* 2007  
Mixed Media on Aluminium 120cm x120cm
7. *My Pussy Loves Rich Boys* 2007  
Mixed Media on Aluminium 120cm x120cm
8. *I Swallow* 2007  
Mixed Media on Aluminium 120cm x120cm
9. *Cherri, Cherri won't u cum out tonite* 2007  
Mixed Media on Aluminium 240cm x 360cm

#### **Series Two *There Goes The Neighbourhood***

10. *Pole Dancer* 2008  
Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 240cm x 120cm
11. *The Pursuit of Hairlessness* 2008  
Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 240cm x 120cm
12. *Be In My Video* 2008  
Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 240cm x 120cm

13. *Anal Fun* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 240cm x 120cm

14. *There Goes The Neighbourhood* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 220cm x 240cm

**Series Three *AmateurLand***

15. *Shower Fun* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 60cm x 120cm

16. *Chubby Wife* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 60cm x 120cm

17. *Home Bear* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 60cm x 120cm

18. *Holiday Swingers* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 60cm x 120cm

19. *Spanking Nannas* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 60cm x 120cm

20. *Young Fags* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 60cm x 120cm

21. *Homegirl Facial* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 60cm x 120cm

22. *Stiletto Boy* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 60cm x 120cm

23. *Amateur Cumshot* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 60cm x 120cm

24. *Popping Momma* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 120cm x 60cm

25. *BBW Blowy* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 120cm x 60cm

26. *Suck My Strap On* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 120cm x 60cm

27. *Handicapable* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 120cm x 60cm

28. *Hubby in Stockings* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 120cm x 60cm

29. *Hairy Pussy* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 120cm x 60cm

30. *Home Anal* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 120cm x 60cm

31. *Meat and Three Veg* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 120cm x 60cm

32. *Black Boyfriend* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 120cm x 60cm

33. *Pissing Boys* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 120cm x 60cm

34. *My Arse* 2008

Aerosol and Enamel on Aluminium 120cm x 60cm

## Appendix D

### Curriculum Vitae February 2009

matwardhobart@gmail.com

1/195 Elizabeth St Hobart 7000

#### Education

2007 - 09	Master of Fine Art	University of Tasmania
2006	Bachelor of Fine Arts with First Class Honours	University of Tasmania
2003 - 05	Bachelor of Fine Arts	University of Tasmania

#### Selected Exhibition History

##### Solo Shows

2008 *Afterpartyafterpartyafterpartyafter* Bett Gallery @ Raincheck Lounge Hobart

2007 *My Pussy Loves Rich Boys* Inflight Gallery Hobart

2007 *I Still Can't Remember What I Did Last Summer* Red Wall Gallery Hobart

2006 *Come Here, Go Away* Entrepot Gallery Hobart

2005 *Trashed* Entrepot Gallery Hobart

2002 *Mouthful* Sidespace Gallery Hobart

##### Group Shows

2009 *55 Foot Deep* 6a Artist Run Initiative Hobart

2009 *Work in Progress* Plimsoll Gallery Hobart

2008 *The Unsustainable Weight of Place* Watch This Space Gallery Alice Springs

2008 *5 Years Of Art* Inflight Gallery Hobart

2008 *Feedback Forum* Top Gallery Hobart

2007 *Edition addiction* Jimmys Skate Shop Hobart

2007 *The Board of Inflight touring exhibition* First Draft Gallery Sydney

Arts Alive Space Launceston

Inflight Gallery Hobart

2007 *Sex and the City* Bus Gallery Melbourne

2007 *Sea Change, Kill Difference* Red Wall Gallery Hobart

2006 *Jammed In* Long Gallery Hobart

2006 *Honours Graduation Show* Plimsoll Gallery Hobart

2005 *Multiprises* Cite d'arts Internationale Paris

2005 *Fat and Flat* Long Gallery Hobart

2004 *Trance* Inflight Gallery Hobart



## **Publications**

2008 Selby, C	<i>After Party</i>	The Mercury 26 <sup>th</sup> July
2007 Selby, C	<i>My Pussy Loves Rich Boys</i>	The Mercury 8 <sup>th</sup> December
2006 Andersch, G	<i>Come Here, Go Away</i>	The Mercury 22 <sup>nd</sup> July

## **Recent Awards, Arts Related Experience**

2008 - 09 U.T.A.S Graduate Research Scholarship to undertake M.F.A

2008 Guest Speaker

For Robert O'Connor      *Moorilla Scholarship Prize* Long Gallery Hobart

For Tiffany Winterbottom      *Sprung, Homegroan Girls in London*

Bett Gallery Hobart

For Inflight Gallery      *The Unsustainable Weight of Place*

Watch This Space Gallery Alice Springs

2007 - 09 Gallery Assistant Plimsoll Gallery

2007 - 09 Inflight Artist Run Initiative Board Member

2007 - 08 I.S.C Affordable Studio Collective Board Member

2007 - 08 Painting Mentor U.T.A.S Mentor Scheme

2007 Artist assistant to Fiona Hall Port Arthur Project, Ten Days on the Island

2006 - 09 Edge Radio *Arts on the Edge* Producer/Presenter

2000 - 09 Salamanca Arts Centre *Courtyard Bar* Manager

